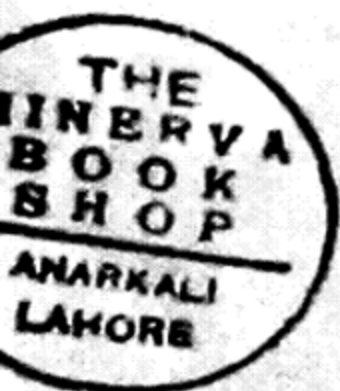


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POETRY & THE DRAMA

MODERN PLAYS  
BY ARNOLD BENNETT & EDWARD  
KNOBLOCK, A. A. MILNE, NOEL  
COWARD, R. C. SHERRIFF  
AND W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

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# MODERN PLAYS

MILESTONES • *Arnold Bennett & Edward Knoblock*

THE DOVER ROAD • *A. A. Milne*

HAY FEVER • *Noel Coward*

JOURNEY'S END • *R. C. Sherriff*

FOR SERVICES RENDERED

*W. Somerset Maugham*



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## INTRODUCTION FOR EVERYMAN

EVERYMAN and the Stage have always had a close connection. And when Everyman's Library was initiated it was to the old mystery play, *Everyman*, that the editor and publisher went for their title. Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Sheridan have always been amongst the favourite authors in the Library; there has also been a continued welcome over a number of years for the composite volumes of *Minor Elizabethan Drama*, *Restoration Plays*, and *Eighteenth-century Plays*.

The present volume is intended to be a companion to the three last-mentioned, presenting five representative plays of the twentieth century. It has been a much more difficult book to compile, for not only are the standards of selection less clear and certain, but there are also difficulties of copyright and publishing contracts to contend with. It was not possible to obtain a play by Mr Shaw or Mr O'Casey. Sir James Barrie expressed a wish for *Dear Brutus* to be included, but after his death permission to do this could not be obtained.

The five plays that were finally chosen to make up the book, however, can fairly be considered as representative of the best trends and achievements in English comedy and tragedy during the past thirty years.

*Milestones*, by Arnold Bennett and Edward Knoblock, was first produced in 1912, and may be considered as a milestone in dramatic history. It took the full span of a man's life as theme, and set it with naturalism upon the stage. There have been many such chronicle plays since 1912, but it is doubtful if any have been played to so many audiences, and with such unfailing dramatic success.

With *The Dover Road* (1922) and *Hay Fever* (1925) we come to comedy. Mr A. A. Milne's play is the earlier in date and in manners. Typically English in sentiment, slight in theme, it might have been considered as the 'average' English comedy of its era, were it not for an individual delicacy, a freshness of imagination, and a lightness of touch that lifts it high above its type.

Mr Coward is of a younger generation, and as a man of all

trades he has no rival in the theatre of to-day. *Hay Fever* is considered by many to be his best comedy. Its dialogue may not reach the heights of *Private Lives*, but in form and balance of character it is, as the author says, a better play. It shows Mr Coward in his gayest mood. He himself writes: 'I am very much attached to *Hay Fever*. I enjoyed writing it and producing it, and I have frequently enjoyed watching it.'

For tragic contrast we come to *Journey's End* (1928), a play that may be said to epitomize the experience and emotions of Everyman during the Great War. After *Journey's End* it seemed that there was little more for the Stage to say about that tragic interlude. But the aftermath of war has cast its shadow over Europe for twenty years, and this book of modern plays for Everyman is therefore completed with a play in which a wit turns moralist, and ironically surveys the spoils of victory. *For Services Rendered* was not Mr Somerset Maugham's most successful play; but it is probably his greatest.

J. H.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# MILESTONES

ARNOLD BENNETT  
and  
EDWARD KNOBLOCK

e

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TO  
FRANK VERNON

WHO

HAVING BROUGHT THE AUTHORS TOGETHER  
INSTRUCTED THEM TO COLLABORATE IN A PLAY

AND WHO

WHEN THEY HAD OBEYED HIM

PUT THE PLAY ON THE STAGE

WITH AN ART WHICH EVOKED THEIR LIVELIEST GRATITUDE

## CHARACTERS

JOHN RHEAD	NANCY SIBLEY
GERTRUDE RHEAD	LORD MONKHURST
MRS RHEAD	THE HONOURABLE MURIEL
SAMUEL SIBLEY	PYM
ROSE SIBLEY	RICHARD SIBLEY
NED PYM	THOMPSON
EMILY RHEAD	WEBSTER
ARTHUR PREECE	FOOTMAN

*The Scene is laid throughout in the drawing-room of a house in Kensington Gore*

*The First Act is in 1860*

*The Second Act is in 1885*

*The Third Act is in 1912*

---

This play was produced under the direction of Messrs Vedrenne and Eadie, at the Royalty Theatre, London, 5th March 1912, with the following cast:

### ACT I—1860

JOHN RHEAD	.	.	Mr Dennis Eadie
GERTRUDE RHEAD	.	.	Miss Haidee Wright
MRS RHEAD	.	.	Miss Mary Relph
SAMUEL SIBLEY	.	.	Mr Hubert Harben
ROSE SIBLEY	.	.	Miss Mary Jerrold
NED PYM	.	.	Mr Stanley Logan
THOMPSON	.	.	Mr Cassels Cobb

ACT II—1885

JOHN RHEAD . . .	Mr Dennis Eadie
GERTRUDE RHEAD . . .	Miss Haidee Wright
ROSE RHEAD . . .	Miss Mary Jerrold
EMILY RHEAD . . .	Miss Evelyn Weeden
SAM SIBLEY . . .	Mr Hubert Harben
NANCY SIBLEY . . .	Miss Esmé Hubbard
LORD MONKHURST . . .	Mr Stanley Logan
ARTHUR PREECE . . .	Mr Lionel Atwill
THOMPSON . . .	Mr Cassels Cobb

ACT III—1912

SIR JOHN RHEAD . . .	Mr Dennis Eadie
GERTRUDE RHEAD . . .	Miss Haidee Wright
LADY RHEAD . . .	Miss Mary Jerrold
LADY MONKHURST . . .	Miss Evelyn Weeden
LORD MONKHURST . . .	Mr Owen Nares
THE HON. MURIEL PYM . . .	Miss Galdys Cooper
NANCY SIBLEY . . .	Miss Esmé Hubbard
RICHARD SIBLEY . . .	Mr E. Reginald Malcolm
ARTHUR PREECE . . .	Mr Lionel Atwill
WEBSTER . . .	Mr W. Lemmon Warde

THE PLAY PRODUCED BY FRANK VERNON

## ACT I

1860

(NOTE. Right and left are from the point of view of the actor.)

*The Scene represents the drawing-room of a house in Kensington Gore. The house is quite new at the time : all the decorations, pictures, and furniture are of the mid-Victorian period. On the left three long windows look out on Kensington Gardens. On the right a large double door leads into the back drawing-room. A single door on the same side of the room leads to the hall and stairs. In the centre at back a large fireplace with a fire burning in it. The blinds and curtains are drawn ; the lamps are lighted.*

*It is about half-past nine at night of the 29th December 1860.*

*Mrs Rhead, a woman of nearly sixty, is sitting on the sofa, crocheting some lace, which is evidently destined to trim petticoats. Her hair is dressed in the style of 1840, though her dress is of the 1860 period. Near her, in an arm-chair, sits Rose Sibley, a gentle, romantic-looking girl of twenty-one, who is dressed in the height of fashion of the period. She is at work on a canvas wool-work pattern. Cups of after-dinner coffee stand near both ladies.*

MRS RHEAD. Do permit me to look at your work one moment, my dear Rose.

ROSE. With pleasure, Mrs Rhead.

MRS RHEAD. Very pretty indeed. Nothing could be in better taste than these Berlin wool patterns.

ROSE. I got the design from the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*. It's to be one of three cushions for father's study.

MRS RHEAD. I had an idea of doing the same sort of thing for my husband, after we moved into the new house here, three years ago. But then, when he died, I hadn't the heart to go on. So I'm crocheting lace now instead for Gertrude's trousseau. Will you have some more coffee?

ROSE. No, thank you.

MRS RHEAD. Just a drop. Gertrude, pour out—— [*She looks about.*] Now where has Gertrude disappeared to?

ROSE. She left the room some moments ago.

MRS RHEAD. Even between dinner and coffee she must be off.

ROSE. But why?

MRS RHEAD. Do I know, my dear? Just managing the house, and managing it, and managing it. Upon my word, Gertrude performs the duties of the place as if it were the foundry and she were John. My son and daughter are so alike.

ROSE. [*Interjecting enthusiastically.*] One's as splendid as the other.

MRS RHEAD. She keeps account-books now.

ROSE. [*Rather startled.*] Of the house?

MRS RHEAD. [*Nods.*] And she says she shall show John a balance-sheet at quarter-day. Did you ever hear of such behaviour?

ROSE. She always was very active, wasn't she? It's in the blood.

MRS RHEAD. It is not in mine, and I am her mother. No! It is all due to these modern ways; that is what it is.

ROSE. I suppose John's rather pleased.

MRS RHEAD. Yes, John! But what about *your* brother? Will he be pleased? Is Gertrude going to make him the wife his position demands?

ROSE. I'm sure he'll be delighted to have his house managed as this one's managed.

MRS RHEAD. But will it stop at that? Once one begins these modern ways, one never knows where they will end.

ROSE. I must say I was surprised she ever accepted Sam.

MRS RHEAD. [*Deprecatingly.*] Surprised? But why?

ROSE. We Sibleys are such an extremely old-fashioned family. Look at father! And I do believe Sam's worse. Yes, I do believe Sam's worse than father. Thank goodness they have your son for a partner—two such slow-coaches, as they are.

MRS RHEAD. Slow-coaches! My dear, remember the respect due to your father.

ROSE. [*Eagerly.*] Oh, I adore father, and Sam, too! I wouldn't have either of them altered for the world. But I do think Sam's very fortunate in getting Gertrude.

MRS RHEAD. She also is very fortunate, very fortunate indeed. I have the highest respect for Sam's character, and my hope and prayer is that he and Gertrude will influence each other for nothing but good. But, between you and me, my dear, the first six months will be—well—lively, to say the least.

[*Gertrude Rhead enters by the door from the hall, carrying in her hand a cloak of the latest pattern of the period. She is twenty-one, high spirited, independent, afraid of no one.*]



ROSE. What on earth's that, Gertrude?

GERTRUDE. I've just been upstairs to get it. Help me, will you? I wanted to show it you. [*Rose helps Gertrude with the cloak.*] I only bought it to-day, with the money John gave me for Christmas. Thank you—Well?

ROSE. Very daring, isn't it? I suppose it's quite the latest?

GERTRUDE. Next year's. Mother says it's 'fast.'

MRS RHEAD. I hope you'll put it away before the men come up.

GERTRUDE. [*With assumed innocence.*] Why?

MRS RHEAD. Because Samuel will surely not approve of it.

GERTRUDE. I bet he will.

MRS RHEAD. Gertrude!

GERTRUDE. The truth is, Rose, mother's only taken a prejudice against it because I brought it home myself this afternoon in a hansom cab.

ROSE. [*Staggered.*] Alone? In a hansom cab?

MRS RHEAD. You may well be shocked, dear. My lady refuses the carriage, because of keeping the horses standing in this terrible frost. And then she actually hails a hansom-cabriolet! What Samuel would say if he knew I dare not imagine.

GERTRUDE. Well, what harm is there in it, mamma darling? [*Caresses her.*] I do wish you'd remember we're in the year 1860—and very near '61. You really must try to keep up with the times. Why, girls will be riding on the tops of omnibuses some day.

ROSE. [*Protesting.*] Gertrude!

MRS RHEAD. I hope I sha'n't live to see it.

*Enter Thompson, a young butler, from the hall. He collects the coffee cups, putting them all on a tray.*

GERTRUDE. Is the hot-water apparatus working properly, Thompson?

THOMPSON. Moderate, miss.

GERTRUDE. [*Rather annoyed.*] It ought to work perfectly.

ROSE. What's the hot-water apparatus?

GERTRUDE. It's for the bath-room, you know.

ROSE. Yes. I knew you'd got a bathroom.

GERTRUDE. It's just the latest device. John had it put in the week mother was down at Brighton. It was his Christmas surprise for her.

ROSE. Yes, but I don't understand.

GERTRUDE. It's quite simple. We have a boiler behind the



kitchen range, and pipes carry the hot water up to the bath. There's one tap for hot and another for cold.

ROSE. How wonderful!

GERTRUDE. So when you want a hot bath all you have to do——

MRS RHEAD. [*Dryly.*] All we have to do is to tell cook to put down a shoulder of mutton to roast. Very modern!

GERTRUDE. [*Caressing her mother again.*] Horrid old dear! Thompson, why is it working only moderately?

THOMPSON. [*By the door.*] No doubt because cook had orders that the beef was to be slightly underdone, miss.

[*Exit quickly with tray.*]

GERTRUDE. [*To Rose.*] That was to please your carnivorous daddy, Rose, and he never came.

MRS RHEAD. I do hope there's been no trouble down at the foundry between him and my son.

ROSE. So do I.

GERTRUDE. Why are you both pretending? You know perfectly well there has been trouble between them. You must have noticed the chilliness when our respective brothers met to-night.

ROSE. I assure you, Gertrude, I know *nothing*. Sam said not a single word in the carriage.

GERTRUDE. Well, wasn't that enough? Or does he never speak in the carriage?

ROSE. [*To Mrs Rhead.*] Has John said anything?

MRS RHEAD. I understood you to say that the reason your father didn't come to dinner was that he had an urgent appointment, quite unexpectedly, at the last moment.

ROSE. Yes, he asked me to tell you and make his excuses.

GERTRUDE. Urgent appointment at his club—most likely!

MRS RHEAD. I wonder what the trouble can have been.

GERTRUDE. You don't, mother. You know! It's the old story—Sam and his father with their set ideas, pulling one way; and John with his go-ahead schemes, pulling the other—with the result——

MRS RHEAD. The result is that we've had one of the most mournful dinners to-night that I have ever had the pleasure of giving.

GERTRUDE. I know! What a good thing we asked Ned Pym. If he hadn't come to the rescue with his usual facetious, senseless chatter, I do believe Sam and John——

MRS RHEAD. [*Quickly stopping her.*] Here are the gentlemen! Gertrude, take that cloak off.

[Enter from the hall Samuel Sibley, Ned Pym, and John Rhead. Samuel Sibley is twenty-eight, heavy, with a serious face a trifle pompous, but with distinct dignity. Ned Pym, who is a little over twenty, is the young dandy of the day; handsome, tall, with excellent manners, which allow him to carry off his facetious attitude rather successfully. John Rhead comes last. He is twenty-five, full of determination and purpose. He knows what he wants and is going to get it.]

MRS RHEAD. [In a smooth tone to Rose.] Have you seen the new number of *Great Expectations*, dear?

NED. What's this, Gertrude? Charades?

GERTRUDE. [Flouncing her cloak half defiantly at Sam.] Paris!

NED. [Coming between Sam and Gertrude.] Evidently it has lost nothing on the journey over.

GERTRUDE. Ned, would you mind . . . I'm showing it to Sam. [To Sam.] Don't you like it?

SAM. [Forcing himself.] On my betrothed, yes.

NED. [Facetiously.] By the exercise of extreme self-control the lover conceals his enthusiasm for the cloak of his mistress.

GERTRUDE. [Appealing to Sam.] But you do like it—don't you?

SAM. [Evasively.] Isn't it rather original?

GERTRUDE. Of course it is. That's just the point.

SAM. [Surprised.] Just the point?

GERTRUDE. [Taking the cloak off and flinging it half pettishly on a chair.] Oh!

JOHN. It's original, and therefore it has committed a crime. [Looking at Sam.] Isn't that it Sam?

SAM. [Gives John a look and turns to Mrs Rhead with an obvious intention of changing the conversation.] What were you saying about *Great Expectations*, Mrs Rhead?

MRS RHEAD. [At a loss.] What were we saying about *Great Expectations*?

NED. Well, I can tell you one thing about it; it's made my expectations from my uncle smaller than ever.

[He sits by Mrs Rhead.]

MRS RHEAD. Oh, how is dear Lord Monkhurst?

NED. He's very well and quarrelsome, thank you. And his two sons, my delightful cousins, are also in excellent health. Well, as I was going to tell you; you know how my uncle has turned against Dickens since *Little Dorrit*. I happened to say something about *Great Expectations* being pretty fairish, and he up and rode over me like a troop of cavalry.

MRS RHEAD. [*Puzzled.*] A troop of cavalry?

NED. It was at his Christmas party, too, worse luck. He as good as told me I disagreed with him on purpose to annoy him. Now I cannot agree with him solely and simply because he allows me seven hundred a year, can I?

ROSE. Is he so difficult to get on with?

NED. Difficult? He's nothing but a faddist! An absolute old faddist! What can you do with a man that's convinced that spirits'll turn his dining-table, and that Bacon wrote Shakespeare; and that the Benicia Boy's a better man than Tom Sayers?

MRS RHEAD. It seems a great pity you cannot do something to please your uncle.

NED. Would you believe it? He even wanted me to join the Rifle Volunteers. Now, I ask you, can you see me in the Rifle Volunteers, me among a lot of stockbrokers and chimney-sweeps?

GERTRUDE. We cannot, Ned.

NED. And in order to raise my patriotism last night. [*Slapping his knee violently.*] By Jove! [*He jumps up.*] By Heavens! Jiggered! Jiggered!

GERTRUDE and ROSE. Ned!

NED. I am a ruined man! You see before you, kind friends, a man ruined and without hope! Last night my uncle sent me a ticket for the launching of the *Warrior*.

SAM. [*With a sneer.*] The *Warrior*! You didn't miss much!

NED. But my beloved aunt was commanded to be in attendance on Her Royal Highness at the said function. . . . Well, I forgot all about it. I repeat I forgot all about it. My uncle will certainly call this the last straw. There will be no quarterly cheque for me on New Year's Day.

ROSE. What is the *Warrior*?

JOHN. [*Bursting out.*] The *Warrior* is a steam frigate—first vessel of the British Navy to be built entirely of iron. She's over six thousand tons burden, and she represents the beginning of a new era in iron.

ROSE. [*Accordingly.*] How splendid!

JOHN. [*Responding quickly to her mood.*] Ah, you agree with me!

ROSE. [*Enthusiastically.*] Of course! [*She breaks off self-consciously.*] Of course I agree with you.

JOHN. [*After a slight pause—quickly.*] This 29th of December marks a great day in the history of the British Navy.

SAM. [*With a slight superior smile, trying to be gay.*] Nonsense.



All this day marks is the folly of the Admiralty. You may take it as an absolute rule that whatever the Admiralty does is wrong. Always has been, always will be. The *Great Eastern* was the champion White Elephant of the age. And now the *Warrior* has gone her one better.

JOHN. Sam, you don't know what you're saying. How can you talk about the *Warrior* when you've never even so much as laid eyes on the ship?

SAM. Well, have you?

JOHN. Yes—I went to the launch to-day.

SAM. You?

MRS RHEAD. Why did you go, John? You never said a word to me.

JOHN. I went on business.

SAM. You told me you had an appointment with the bank.

JOHN. I only said that because I couldn't stop to argue just then.

SAM. So you said what wasn't so.

JOHN. I said what was necessary at the moment. I wasn't going to leave you in the dark; never fear.

SAM. [*Curtly controlling himself.*] I see. [*A slight pause, then Sam turns abruptly to Gertrude and says gently.*] Come and sing, dear. I haven't heard you sing for over a fortnight.

GERTRUDE. [*Moved by the quarrel—after a pause in a low voice.*] What shall I sing?

SAM. Sing 'Nita, Juanita.'

GERTRUDE. No! I heard Madame Sainton Dolby sing it last week.

SAM. Do!—to please me.

[*Gertrude turns towards the double doors and goes off in silence with Sam.*]

[*Ned is about to follow instantly, but Mrs Rhead stops him.*]

MRS RHEAD. [*Whispering.*] Give them just one instant alone.

NED. I beg pardon. My innocence at fault. [*The song is heard.*]  
[*A pause.*] Is that long enough?

[*Mrs Rhead taps him, then she goes off after the others, followed by Ned.*]

[*A slight pause.*]

ROSE. [*Moving towards the doors.*] What a lovely voice she has!

JOHN. [*Abruptly, closing the doors.*] I want to talk to you.

ROSE. [*Nervous and self-conscious.*] To me?

JOHN. I wish I'd asked you to come to that launch.

ROSE. Where was it?

JOHN. At Greenhithe; only two stations beyond the foundry.  
Would you have come?

ROSE. I should have loved to . . . if Gertrude had come too.

JOHN. [*Musing.*] You should have seen her go into the water—the wave she made! All that iron—and rivets! Iron, mind you. . . . And then float like a cork. I never was at a launch before, and it gave me a thrill, I can tell you. And I'm not easily thrilled.

ROSE. [*Adoringly, but restraining herself.*] I'm sure you're not. I do wish I'd seen it. It must have been almost sublime.

JOHN. You'd have understood. You'd have felt like I did. Do you know how I know that?

ROSE. [*Shaking her head.*] No——

JOHN. By the way you said 'how splendid' when I was telling the others just now.

ROSE. Really!

JOHN. Fact! That gave me more encouragement in my schemes than any words I ever heard.

ROSE. Please don't say that. Gertrude is always on your side. She's so like you in every way.

JOHN. Yes, Gertrude's all right. But she's got no poetry in her, Gertrude hasn't. That's the difference between you and her. She's very go-ahead; but she doesn't feel. You feel.

ROSE. [*Breathless.*] Do I, John! [*She looks down.*]

JOHN. I'll tell you something—tears came into my eyes when that frigate took the water. Couldn't help it!

[*Rose raises her eyes to his.*]

In thirty years every big ship in the world will be built of iron. Very few people to-day believe in iron for ship-building, and I know there's a lot of silly, easy sarcasm about it—especially in the papers. But it's coming! It's coming!

ROSE. [*Religiously.*] I'm sure you're right.

JOHN. If only your father and your brother thought as you do!

ROSE. [*Faintly.*] Yes.

JOHN. I'm in the minority, you see; two partners against one. If my father had lived, I know which side *he'd* have been on! I shouldn't have been in the minority then.

ROSE. You'd have been equal.

JOHN. [*Enthusiastically.*] No! We should certainly have rolled your excellent father and brother straight into the Thames!

ROSE. [*Amiably protesting.*] Please——

JOHN. [*Smiling.*] Forgive me—you know what I mean, don't you?

ROSE. I love to see you when you are enthusiastic!

JOHN. It's so plain. We've got probably the largest iron foundry on Thames-side. But our business isn't increasing as quickly as it used to do. It can't. We've come to about the limit of expansion on present lines. Shipbuilding is simply waiting for us. There it is—asking to be picked up! We're *in* iron. We know all about iron. The ships of the future will be built of nothing but iron. And we're right in the middle of the largest port in the world. What more can any one want? But no! They won't see it! They—will—not—see—it!

ROSE. I wonder why they won't!

JOHN. Simply because they can't.

ROSE. Then one oughtn't to blame them.

JOHN. Blame them! Good Heavens, no! I don't blame them. I'm fond of them, and I rather feel for them. But that's just why I want to smash them to smithereens! They've got to yield. The people who live in the past *must* yield to the people who live in the future. Otherwise, the earth would begin to turn the other way round, and we should be back again in the eighteenth century before we knew where we were, making for the Middle Ages.

ROSE. Then you think a conflict is unavoidable?

JOHN. Absolutely unavoidable! That's the point. It's getting nearer every hour. . . . Why is your father not here to-night?

ROSE. I don't know, but I was afraid——

JOHN. I know and Sam knows. It must be because he has heard somehow of an enterprise I am planning, and the news has upset him. He's vexed.

ROSE. Poor dear old thing! Then you've started a scheme already?

JOHN. [*Nods.*] I have. But I can't carry it out alone.

ROSE. If there is one man in the world who could stand alone, I should have said you were that man.

JOHN. I know. That's the impression I give. And yet nobody ever needed help more than I do. I'm not all on the surface, you know.

ROSE. What sort of help?

JOHN. Sympathy—understanding.

ROSE. [*Low.*] I see.

JOHN. Of course you see! And that's why I suddenly decided I must have a bit of a chat with you—this very night. It's



forced on me. And I feel I'm rather forcing it on you. But I can't help it—honestly I can't. Rose, you're on my side, aren't you?

ROSE. I believe you're in the right.

JOHN. Would you like to see me win—[*Silence*—or lose?

ROSE. I don't think I could bear to see you beaten.

JOHN. Well, then, help me! When you look at me with that trustful look of yours, I can do anything—anything. No other woman's eyes ever had the same effect on me. It's only because you believe in me. No, that isn't the only reason; it isn't the chief reason. The chief reason is that I'm in love with you—there you have it!

ROSE. [*Sinking her head.*] Oh!—

JOHN. [*Coming to her.*] Curious! I've known you all my life. But I wasn't aware of all that you meant to me, until these difficulties began. You're essential to me. You can't imagine how much depends on just you!

ROSE. Really?

JOHN. You're too modest, too womanly to realize it. Why, sometimes a tone of yours, a mere inflection, almost knocks me over—You aren't crying, surely? What are you crying for?

ROSE. It's too much for me, coming like this, with no warning.

JOHN. Rose, be mine! I'll work for you, I'll succeed for you. No woman in this country shall have a finer position than yours.

ROSE. I don't want a fine position—except for you.

JOHN. I'm not hard, really.

ROSE. But I like you to be hard. It's when you're inflexible and brutal that I like you the most.

JOHN. Then you do like me a little—sometimes?

[*Kisses her hands.*

ROSE. I can't help telling you. I didn't hope for this. Yes, I did. But the hope seemed absurd. Is this real—now?

JOHN. My love!

ROSE. John, you say I don't realize how much I mean to you. Perhaps I do though. But it's impossible for *you* to realize how I want to give my life to you, to serve you. No *man* could realize that. A woman could. I shall be your slave. [*John looks at her with a little start.*] Yes, I know it sounds queer for me to be talking like this. But I must. It thrills me to tell you . . . I shall be your slave.

JOHN. Don't make me afraid, my darling!

ROSE. Afraid?

JOHN. Afraid of being unworthy.

ROSE. Please . . . [*A slight pause.*] Has the singing stopped?

JOHN. A long time ago.

ROSE. They 'll be coming in, perhaps.

JOHN. [*Vaguely without conviction.*] No.

ROSE. What will your mother and Gertrude say?

JOHN. You know as well as I do, they 'll be absolutely delighted.

ROSE. And father?

JOHN. [*Alertly.*] Rose, you 're mine, whatever happens?

ROSE. Oh, nothing must happen now! Nothing shall happen!

JOHN. But suppose I couldn't carry out my scheme without quarrelling with your father? And he refused his consent to our being married?

ROSE. My heart would be yours for ever and ever. But I couldn't marry without father's consent.

JOHN. But——

ROSE. I couldn't——

JOHN. Why not?

ROSE. It would not be right.

JOHN. But you love me?

ROSE. Yes, but I love father, too. And he 's getting very old. And he 's very dependent on me. In any case to give me up would be a great sacrifice for him. To lose me against his will—well, I don't know what would happen!

JOHN. As things are just now—he 's bound to refuse.

ROSE. But are you so sure he won't have anything to do with your scheme?

JOHN. You heard Sam!

ROSE. Yes; but you haven't discussed your plans very thoroughly with Sam. He seemed quite surprised.

JOHN. Suppose I speak to Sam to-night; tell him everything. At any rate, I shall know then where I stand.

ROSE. To-night?

JOHN. Now! I *might* win him over. Anyhow, he 'll do what he can to make things smooth for us with your father—surely! After all, he 's engaged to Gertrude!

ROSE. Just as you think best. . . . And Sam 's very fond of me, though he never shows it.

JOHN. Let me get it over now, instantly. Will you go in to the others?

[*Rose looks at him in silence, then rises and goes to the double doors. John stops her and solemnly and passionately kisses her, then opens the doors and she passes through.*]



JOHN. [*Calling into the other room.*] I say, Sam! Mother, I want a word with Sam alone.

[*Samuel enters by the double doors. John closes them behind him.*

SAM. [*Suspicious, and not over friendly.*] What is it? Not business, O hope?

JOHN. [*With a successful effort to be cordial.*] No, no!

SAM. [*Following John's lead, and to make conversation.*] I was wondering what you and Rosie were palavering about.

JOHN. Samuel, you've gone right into the bull's eye at the first shot. I've just been through a very awkward moment.

SAM. Oh, I see! That's it, is it?

JOHN. I've made a proposal of marriage to my partner's sister. Startling, ain't it?

SAM. No! If you care to know, I was talking to your mother about it last week.

JOHN. About what?

SAM. About the betting odds—whether it was more likely to come off this year or next. Your mother was right, and I was wrong—by a couple of days.

JOHN. [*Startled.*] But you'd none of you the slightest ground. I've never shown—Certainly Rose has never shown—

SAM. [*Teasingly.*] No, of course not. But you know how people *will* gossip, and jump to conclusions, don't you? I know, I went through it myself, not very long ago either. I remember the clever way in which you all knew about it before I'd got half-way to the end of my first sentence.

JOHN. Sam, you're devilish funny.

SAM. Even the dullest old Tory is funny once in his life. Am I right in assuming that Rose did not unconditionally refuse your offer?

JOHN. She did me the honour to accept it.

SAM. I must confess I'm not entirely surprised that she didn't spurn you.

JOHN. All right, old cock. Keep it up. I don't mind. But when you're quite done, you mighr congratulate me.

SAM. [*Not effusively.*] I do, of course.

JOHN. I suppose you'll admit, even as a brother, that I'd have to go rather far before I met a woman with half Rose's qualities.

SAM. Yes, Rosie's all right. Of course she's cold; she hasn't got what I call poetry in her. That's the difference between her and Gertrude.

JOHN. [*Facing him.*] Do you honestly think Rose has no poetry in her? Rose?

SAM. Easy does it, my tulip! Have it your own way!

JOHN. [*Good humouredly.*] I suppose where sisters are concerned, all brothers are alike.

SAM. Well, I'm looking at one. We're a pair.

JOHN. Shake! [*They shake hands, Sam rather perfunctorily.*] Now, Sam, I'm going to rely on you.

SAM. What for?

JOHN. I don't think you had any fault to find with my attitude towards your engagement, had you? I welcomed it with both arms. Well, I want you to do the same with me.

SAM. But, my dear fellow, I'm nobody in the affair. You're the head of a family; I'm not.

JOHN. But you have enormous influence with the head of a family, my boy.

SAM. [*Rather falsely.*] Why! Are you anticipating trouble with the governor?

JOHN. I'm not anticipating it—but you know as well as I do—probably much better—that he ain't very friendly disposed this last day or two. The plain truth is—he's sulking. Now why? Nothing whatever has passed between us except just everyday business.

SAM. Well, the fact is, he suspects you're keeping something nasty up your sleeve for him.

JOHN. Has he told you?

SAM. [*Somewhat pugnaciously.*] Yes, he has.

JOHN. And what is it I'm supposed to have up my sleeve?

SAM. Look here, Jack. I'm not here to be cross-examined. If there's anything up your sleeve, you're the person to know what it is. It's not my sleeve we're talking about. Why don't you play with the cards on the table?

JOHN. I'm only too anxious to play with the cards on the table.

SAM. Then it is business you really wanted to talk about after all!

JOHN. [*Movement of irritation concealed.*] I expect your father's heard about me and Macleans, though how it's got abroad I can't imagine.

SAM. Macleans? Macleans of Greenhithe?

JOHN. Yes. That's what's worrying the old man, isn't it?

SAM. I don't know.

JOHN. He hasn't mentioned Macleans to you?

SAM. He has not. He isn't a great talker, you know. He merely said to me he suspected you were up to something.



JOHN. And what did you say?

SAM. Briefly, I said I thought you *were*. [*Disgustedly.*] But, by gad! I never dreamed you were hobnobbing with the Maclean gang.

JOHN. Macleans are one of the oldest shipbuilding firms in the south of England. I went to the launch to-day with Andrew Maclean.

SAM. What's shipbuilding got to do with us?

JOHN. It's got nearly everything to do with us. Or it will have. Now listen, Sammy. I've arranged a provisional agreement for partnership between Macleans and ourselves.

SAM. You've——

JOHN. Half a minute. Macleans are rather flattered at the idea of a connection with the august firm of Sibley, Rhead and Sibley.

SAM. By God! I should think they were. [*Walks away.*]

JOHN. They've had an output of over 25,000 tons this year. All wood. Naturally they want to go in for iron. They'll pay handsomely for our help and experience. In fact, I've got a draft agreement, my boy, that is simply all in our favour.

SAM. Did you seriously suppose——

JOHN. Let me finish. It's a brilliant agreement. In three years it'll mean the doubling of our business. And we shall have the satisfaction of being well-established in the great industry of the future. Your father's old. I don't expect him to be very enthusiastic about a new scheme. But you're young, and you can influence him. He'll be retiring soon, and you and I will be together—just the two of us. We're marrying each other's sisters. And we shall divide an enormous fortune, my boy.

SAM. And have you had the impudence to try to make an agreement behind our backs?

JOHN. [*Controlling himself.*] I've made no agreement. I've only got the offer. It's open to you to refuse or accept. I only held my tongue about it so as to keep the job as easy as possible.

SAM. You had no right to approach any one without consulting us.

JOHN. I was going to tell you to-morrow. But I guessed from your father's attitude these last two days that something had leaked out. That's why I'm telling you first, Sam—to-night. Come now, look at the thing calmly—reasonably. Don't condemn it offhand. A very great deal depends on your decision—more than you think.

SAM. I don't see that anything particular depends on my decision. If we refuse, we refuse. And we shall most decidedly refuse.

JOHN. But it's impossible you should be so blind to the future! Impossible!

SAM. See, here, John! Don't you make the mistake of assuming that any man who doesn't happen to agree with you is a blind fool. To begin with, it isn't polite. I know you *do* think we're blind, old-fashioned, brainless dolts, father and I. We've both felt that for some time.

JOHN. I think you're blind to the future of iron ships, that's all.

SAM. Well, shall I tell you what we think of *you*? We think you've got a bee in your bonnet. That's all. We think you're a faddist in the style of Ned Pym's noble uncle!

JOHN. [*His lips curling.*] Me like Lord Monkhurst! Ha!

SAM. Precisely. Don't you go and imagine that all the arguments are on one side. They aren't. Five-sixths of the experts in England have no belief whatever in the future of iron ships. You know that! Iron ships indeed! And what about British oak? Would you build ships of the self-same material as bridges? Why not stone ships, then? Oh, yes, I know there's a number of faddists up and down the land—anything in the nature of a novelty is always bound to attract a certain type of brain. Unfortunately we happen to have that type of brain just now in the Cabinet. I quite agree with my father that the country is going to the dogs. Another Reform Bill this year! And actually an attempt to repeal the paper duty. But, of course, people who believe in iron ships would naturally want to unsettle the industrial classes by a poisonous flood of cheap newspapers! However, we've had enough common sense left to knock both those schemes on the head. And I've no doubt the sagacity of the country will soon also put an end to this fantastic notion of iron ships.

JOHN. [*Quietly.*] I see.

SAM. Oh, don't think I'm not fond of iron! Iron means as much to me as it does to you. But I flatter myself I can keep my balance. [*More quietly.*] We didn't expect this of you, John, with your intellect.

JOHN. [*As before.*] Very well.

SAM. I've made it clear, haven't I?

JOHN. Quite.

SAM. That's all right.

JOHN. [*Still quietly.*] Only I shall dissolve partnership.



SAM. Dissolve partnership? What for?

JOHN. I shall go on with Macleans alone.

SAM. You don't mean it.

JOHN. I mean every single word of it!

*[He rises. They look at each other.]*

SAM. Then I can tell you one thing. You won't marry Rosie.

JOHN. Why shan't I marry Rosie?

SAM. After such treachery.

JOHN. *[Raising his voice.]* Treachery! I merely keep my own opinion—I leave you to yours.

SAM. Do you think father will let you drag Rose into this fatuous scheme of yours? Do you think he'll give his daughter to a traitor?

JOHN. *[Sarcastic and cold.]* Don't get on stilts. *[Then suddenly bursting out.]* And what has my marriage got to do with you? When I want your father's opinion, I'll go to your father for it.

SAM. Don't try to browbeat me, John. I know my father's mind, and what's more, you know I know it. And I repeat, my father will never let his daughter marry a——

JOHN. *[Shouting.]* Silence!

*Enter Mrs Rhead by the double doors, followed by Ned Pym, Gertrude, and Rose. The women remain silent.*

NED. *[Facetiously, coming forward.]* Why silence? Go on. We've only come in because we thought it might interest us. What's it all about? A hint will suffice.

JOHN. Ned, you're a blundering donkey, and you will be a blundering donkey to the end of your life.

NED. My one desire is to please.

GERTRUDE. *[Coming to Sam, in a quiet, firm tone.]* Sam, what's the matter?

SAM. Nothing! We must go! Rosie, get ready. *[Very respectfully to Mrs Rhead.]* I'm sorry to break up the evening.

GERTRUDE. But you can't go like this.

SAM. *[With deference.]* My dear Gertrude, please leave matters to your brother and me. You're a woman, and there are things——

GERTRUDE. *[Stopping him.]* It is possible I am a woman, but I'm a reasonable creature, and I intend to be treated as such.

MRS RHEAD. *[Very upset.]* My dear child, remember you are speaking to your future husband.

GERTRUDE. That's just why I'm speaking as I am. I ask

Sam what's the matter—[*scornfully*—and he says 'Nothing.'

Am I a child? Are we all children?

SAM. [*Curly.*] Come, now, Rose.

GERTRUDE. And why must Rose go off like this? She's engaged to John.

SAM. Who told you?

GERTRUDE. Her eyes told me when she came out of this room.

MRS RHEAD. We all knew it, and no word said. We've been expecting it for weeks. [*Mrs Rhead and Rose embrace.*]

SAM. You are mistaken, Gertrude. Rose is not engaged to John, and she is not likely to be.

GERTRUDE. You object?

SAM. I do, and I know my father will.

GERTRUDE. You object to John for a brother-in-law? John! Why?—You might at least condescend to tell Rosie, if not me. It's an affair that rather interests her, you see.

SAM. If you must know, John is going to leave our firm.

MRS RHEAD. John?

SAM. He thinks my father and I are old-fashioned, and so he's leaving us.

MRS RHEAD. John! Leave the firm? Surely you're not thinking of breaking up Rhead and Sibley?

SAM. Sibley, Rhead—and Sibley.

MRS RHEAD. It was Rhead and Sibley in my young days, when your father and John's were founding it. John, you cannot mean it!

SAM. [*Sarcastically.*] He's going to build iron ships.

GERTRUDE. And is that any reason why you should make poor Rosie unhappy and spoil her life?

SAM. I do not propose to argue.

GERTRUDE. The man who does not propose to argue with me is not going to be my husband.

MRS RHEAD. Gertrude!

GERTRUDE. [*Looking at Sam.*] I mean it. [*Sam bows.*]

MRS RHEAD. Please don't listen to her, Sam.

SAM. All my apologies, Mrs Rhead.

GERTRUDE. And you, Rosie, what do you say to all this?

ROSE. [*Humbly and tearfully.*] I—I hardly understand. Sam, what is the matter?

JOHN. [*Coming to Rose.*] It's quite simple. I believe in the future of iron ships and I have the courage of my convictions. Therefore you are not to be allowed to marry me. You see the

connection is perfectly clear. But you shall marry me, all the same!

SAM. [*Confidently*] You don't know my sister.

NED. [*To Sam, facetiously.*] And you don't know John.

SAM. [*Turning to Ned, firmly.*] Ned, go and order my carriage, there's a good fellow.

NED. [*Going off by the door into the hall.*] Oh, very well.

[*He closes the door behind him.*]

MRS RHEAD. John, John, why are you so set in your own ideas? Everything was going perfectly smoothly. We were all so happy. And now you must needs fall out with your partners over iron ships. Do you prefer your iron ships to Rose's happiness and your own? *Is everything* to be sacrificed to iron ships?

JOHN. There need be no question of sacrifice, if—

SAM. If you can have it your own way. Of course. Mrs Rhead, your son wants to risk the ruin of all of us. Now, so far as we Sibleys are concerned, we won't allow him to do so. If he still persists in his purpose, very well, that's *his* look out. Only—he can hardly be surprised if Rose's family object—and very strongly—to letting him make her his wife. One does not entrust one's daughter or one's sister to a traitor.

GERTRUDE. Sam, don't be childish!

SAM. [*Drawing himself up.*] I beg your pardon.

MRS RHEAD. John, I'm your mother. Listen to me. Give up this idea of yours. For my sake—for the sake of all of us.

JOHN. I cannot.

MRS RHEAD. But if it means so much unhappiness.

JOHN. I should be ashamed of myself if I gave it up. I believe in it. It's my religion.

MRS RHEAD. John, I beg you not to be profane.

JOHN. [*A little quieter.*] I cannot give up my idea, mother. I should be a coward to give it up. I should be miserable for the rest of my days. I could never look any one in the face, not even my wife.

[*Enter Ned from the hall.*]

NED. [*To Sam in a flunkey's voice.*] Carriage is waiting, my lord.

SAM. Now, Rose! Good evening, Mrs Rhead.

GERTRUDE. Just a moment. [*Drawing a ring off her finger.*]

Ned! Hand this ring to Mr Sibley with my compliments.

NED. Must I?

GERTRUDE. Yes.

NED. [*Taking the ring.*] The donkey becomes a beast of burden.



[*Handing ring to Sam.*] Sam, you get this, but you lose something that's worth a lot more.

SAM. [*Taking the ring.*] Of course I have no alternative.

ROSE. Good-bye, John.

MRS RHEAD. John, she's going. Will you let her?

JOHN. [*Rigidly.*] I cannot give up my idea.

SAM. [*Going into the hall as Rose stands hesitating.*] Come along, child. I'm waiting.

ROSE. [*Moving a step towards John.*] Stick to your idea! Let me go! I love you all the more for it!

JOHN. Don't worry, Rose. The future is on our side.

ROSE. [*Looking straight at him.*] I——

[*Her emotion gets the better of her; she turns quickly and hurries from the room.*]

GERTRUDE. [*Blankly, in spite of herself.*] The future!

[*She sinks down on a sofa and bursts into sobs. John stands, looking after Rose.*]

CURTAIN



## ACT II

1885

*The scene represents the same drawing-room as in Act I. But twenty-five years have passed. We are now in the year 1885. Consequently great changes have occurred. The furniture has been re-arranged and added to. The flowered carpet of the first Act has given place to an Indian carpet. There are new ornaments amongst some of the old ones. The room is over-crowded with furniture in the taste of the period.*

*It is about four o'clock of an afternoon in June. The curtains are drawn back and the sun is shining brightly outside.*

*Rose Sibley, now Mrs John Rhead, forty-six years of age and dressed in the fashion of 1885, her hair slightly grey at the temples, is seated writing some notes at a desk near the windows.*

*Ned Pym, the new Lord Monkhurst, enters from the hall, followed by John Rhead. The former has developed into a well-preserved, florid, slightly self-sufficient man of about forty-five. The latter, now fifty, has not changed so much physically except that his hair is grey and his features have become much firmer. But his manner has grown even more self-assured than it was in the first Act. He is in fact a person of authority; the successful man whose word is law.*

JOHN. Oh, you *are* there, Rosie. I've brought a person of importance to see you.

ROSE. [*Rising.*] Ned—— [*They shake hands.*]

NED. Now please don't say what you were going to say.

ROSE. And what was I going to say?

NED. That I'm quite a stranger since I came into the title.

ROSE. [*Curtsying and teasing.*] Lord Monkhurst, we are only too flattered—I was merely going to say that you look younger than ever.

NED. [*Seriously.*] Don't I? That's what every one says. Time leaves me quite unchanged, don't you know.

JOHN. In every way. How old *are* you, Ned?

NED. [*With a sigh.*] Well, I shall never see thirty again.

JOHN. What about forty?

NED. Or forty either. But my proud boast is I'm nearer forty than fifty.

JOHN. Well, it can only be by a couple of months.

NED. Sh!—It's a lot more than you say, Jack.

JOHN. I was fifty in April. There's just five years difference between us.

ROSE. [*To Ned.*] You look more like John's son.

NED. Say nephew; don't be too hard on him.

ROSE. But I do wish you would go out of mourning. It doesn't suit you.

NED. Not these beautiful continuations?

ROSE. No!

NED. Well, I'm awfully sorry. But I can't oblige you yet. Please remember I've got three sudden deaths to work off. I think that when a man loses a harsh but beloved uncle in a carriage accident, and two amiable cousins through a misunderstanding about toadstools, all in twelve months, why—[*gesture*—the least he can do is to put himself unreservedly into the hands of his tailor.

ROSE. I——

JOHN. [*Stopping her, kindly but rather tyrannically.*] Now enough of this graceful badinage. Ned and I are here on business. What are you up to, there, Rose?

ROSE. [*With eager submissiveness.*] I was doing the invitations for the dinner, or rather for the reception.

JOHN. Good. I've got some more names in my study. You'd better come in there with me.

ROSE. Yes, love.

NED. Am I invited to this dinner? I generally get very hungry about eight o'clock at nights.

ROSE. [*Teasing.*] Yes, I *think* I put you down. It's our wedding-day.

NED. Don't tell me how long you've been married. It would age me!

ROSE. Considering that we have a daughter who is turned twenty-two.

JOHN. Yes, Ned, you must face the facts bravely. Old Mr Sibley died in January 1860——

ROSE. Sixty-one, love.

JOHN. [*After a frown at being corrected.*] Sixty-one. And we were married in June of the following year. Surely you recall the face Sam pulled when he gave my little Rosie away.

ROSE. But, love, it was a great concession for him to give me away at all, wasn't it?

JOHN. Oh, yes!

ROSE. By the bye, he's coming up to town this afternoon.

JOHN. What, here?

NED. Oh! But I ought to see old Sam.

ROSE. Stay for tea, and you'll see him and his wife, too.

NED. His wife? His what did you say?

ROSE. Now, Ned, it's no use pretending you don't know all about it.

NED. I remember hearing a couple of years ago, before I went to India, that Sam had staggered his counting-house by buying one of these new typewriting machines, and getting a young woman to work it for him.

ROSE. That's the person. Her name is Nancy.

NED. Is it? Only fancy, Nancy, Nancy, in the counting-house! I say—are these girl-clerks or clerk-girls going to be a regular thing? What's coming over the world?

JOHN. [*Shakes his head.*] Passing craze! Goes with all this Votes-for-Women agitation and so on. You'll see, it won't last a year—not a year! Of course, Sam—susceptible bachelor of fifty and over—just the man to fall a victim. Inevitable!

ROSE. She's a very well-meaning, honest creature.

NED. You intimate with her, Rose?

ROSE. I went to see her several times after she had her baby. They're living at Brockley.

NED. Baby! Brockley! No more typewriting then. The typewriter has served its turn—eh? Of course it was a great catch for her.

JOHN. Yes, but it wouldn't have been if Samuel hadn't sold out.

NED. How much did he retire with about?

JOHN. Well, you see he was losing three thousand a year. He got £20,000 net cash.

NED. I'm not a financier, but £20,000 cash in exchange for a loss of £3,000 a year doesn't seem so bad! Think of the money he'd have made though, if he'd taken up with your ideas!

JOHN. [*Ironically.*] You recollect the folly of iron ships? And the bee in my bonnet? [*Laughs.*] There were only four wooden steamships built in this country last year. The rest were iron; and I was responsible for half a dozen of 'em.

NED. What's all this talk about steel for ships?

JOHN. [*Disdainfully.*] Just talk.



NED. Well, of course, if you're building at the rate of six steamers a year, I can understand your generosity in the matter of subscriptions.

ROSE. He *is* generous, isn't he?

NED. Told your wife about your latest contribution?

JOHN. No, I was just going to.

ROSE. [*Proudly.*] John tells me everything.

JOHN. And Rosie always approves, don't you, Rosie? Ah! The new generation can't show such wives.

ROSE. [*Eagerly.*] Well?

JOHN. I've decided to give ten thousand pounds to the party funds—politics, you know.

NED. You see, it's to save the country. That's what it amounts to practically, in these days. I know, since I've gone into politics.

ROSE. How noble! I'm so glad, John.

NED. And the great secret—shall I tell her, or will you, Jack?

JOHN. Go on.

NED. How should you like your husband to be a baronet, Rose?

ROSE. A baronet?

NED. Sir John Rhead, Bart, and Lady Rhead!

ROSE. [*Ecstatic.*] Is he going to be?

NED. As soon as our side comes into power—and we shall be in power in a month. John'll be on the next Honours List.

ROSE. In a month!

NED. The Budget's bound to be thrown out. They're trying to increase the taxes on beer and spirits—I've studied the question deeply. I know what will happen.

ROSE. How magnificent!

JOHN. Then you approve? [*Rose kisses John fondly.*] That's all we've called in for, just to make sure.

ROSE. [*Weeping.*] I——

JOHN. What's the matter?

ROSE. I'm only sorry we haven't had a son.

NED. There, there! I'm sure you did your best, Rose.

ROSE. [*To John.*] Are they making you a baronet because you're giving ten thousand to the party funds?

NED. My dear woman! Of course not! That's pure coincidence.

ROSE. [*Convinced.*] Oh!

NED. Your beloved John will be made a baronet solely on account of his splendid services to commerce. Doesn't he deserve it?

ROSE. No one better. Do you know, I can scarcely believe it.

Who——? Tell me all about it.

JOHN. Well, it's thanks to Ned in the first place.

ROSE. To Ned?

NED. [*Pretending to be hurt.*] You needn't be so surprised, Rose.

You seem to be unaware that I've gone into politics. Don't you read the newspapers?

ROSE. No, I leave the newspapers to my daughter.

NED. If you did, you'd know that I made a sensation in the Indian Debate, in the House of Lords. All that Afghanistan business, don't you know.

ROSE. Really!

NED. Oh, I became quite a Nob, at once. Bit of luck me having gone to India, wasn't it? I'd spent the best part of a month in India; so, of course, I knew all about it.

ROSE. [*Solemnly.*] Of course.

NED. The leader of the Opposition said I had a great future!

JOHN. No doubt.

NED. [*Simply.*] I shall specialize in India and the Navy. You see, my father being a rear-admiral, I ought to be familiar with the subject. If fellows like me don't begin to take an interest in our neglected Navy, England'll be playing second fiddle to Russia in five years' time. Mark my word, in 1890. In 1890.

ROSE. Perhaps you'll be in the Government some day?

NED. There's no 'perhaps' about it. I shall! There's only one difficulty.

ROSE. What's that?

NED. [*Mysteriously and important.*] I'm told I ought to marry.

JOHN. [*Rather self-consciously.*] Nothing simpler.

NED. I know! I've had seventeen indirect offers this last six months, and that's a fact.

ROSE. None suitable?

NED. I'm afraid of 'em. It's no joke going and marrying a perfect stranger. I want somebody I know—somebody I've known all my life, or at least all hers.

ROSE. And can't you find her?

NED. I can. I *have* done.

ROSE. Who is it, may one ask?

NED. Jack knows.

JOHN. [*Turning to Rose and clearing his throat.*] Ned would like to marry into *our* family, Rose.

NED. [*Eagerly.*] You know I've been ~~dead sweet~~ on Emily for a couple of years at least.

ROSE. [*After a pause.*] I know you 're very fond of her, and she of you.

NED. [*As above.*] You think she is, really?

ROSE. But it seems so queer.

JOHN. [*Peremptorily.*] How queer? We 're respectable enough for the ~~young~~ rascal, aren't we?

ROSE. Of course. It would be ideal—ideal! My poor little Emily!

NED. Well, I 've got that off my chest. I 'll be moving. I must be at the Carlton at three-thirty to settle up John's business with the Panjandrum.

ROSE. You 'll come back to tea. *She 'll be here.*

*[Enter from the hall Emily and Gertrude. Both are dressed to go out. Emily is a handsome girl of twenty-two. She has fine qualities, combining her father's pluck with her mother's loving nature. But she has been rather spoilt by her parents. Gertrude follows. She has grown into a faded, acidy spinster with protective impulses for her niece Emily, on whom she spends all her suppressed maternal feelings.]*

EMILY. [*Slightly disconcerted.*] Why, father! How is it you aren't at the works this afternoon earning our bread-and-butter?

JOHN. [*Delighted.*] Such impertinence!

ROSE. Emily, I really wonder at you! What your grandmother Rhead would have said to such manners if she 'd been alive, I daren't think. And Lord Monkhurst here, too!

EMILY. Well, mamma, you see, grandmother isn't alive! [*To Ned, who, after shaking hands with Gertrude, advances towards her.*] And as for dear old Uncle Ned—— [*Ned, John, and Rose are all somewhat put about by this greeting. Ned hesitates, his hand half out.*] Aren't you going to shake hands, then?

NED. [*Shaking hands.*] Why 'uncle'? You 've never called me uncle before?

EMILY. Haven't I? It seems to suit you.

NED. I 'm severely wounded. And I shall retire into my wigwam until you make it up to me.

ROSE. You really are very pert, Emily.

EMILY. [*Affectionately.*] I should have thought you would adore being my uncle. I 'm sure I like you lots more than I like Uncle Sam, for instance.

NED. That 's better. I 'm peeping out of my wigwam now. Only I won't be your uncle. I won't be anybody's uncle. I don't mind being your cousin, if that 's any use to you.



GERTRUDE. [*Sharply.*] He's afraid of being taken for the same age as your auntie, darling.

NED. [*To Gertrude.*] Half a moment, Gertrude, and I'll try to think of a compliment that will turn your flank.

GERTRUDE. My flank, Ned?

NED. I mean——

EMILY. [*To her parents and Ned.*] Where were you all off to?

ROSE. Your father and I are going to the study.

NED. And I'm going on an errand, but I shan't be long.

JOHN. And may we ask where you and Auntie Gertrude are 'off to,' Miss Inquisitive?

GERTRUDE. Oh, Mr Preece is calling for us to take us to the Royal Academy.

EMILY. And then we shall have tea at the new Hotel Métropole, in Northumberland Avenue. It's the very latest thing.

JOHN. [*In a different tone.*] Preece? But he was here last Sunday.

EMILY. Yes, it was then we arranged it.

JOHN. I don't like the idea of your seeing so much of Preece. And your mother doesn't like it, either.

ROSE. No, indeed!

GERTRUDE. But why not? He's the cleverest man in your works. You've often said so.

JOHN. He may be the cleverest man in my works; but he isn't going to be the cleverest man in my house. Who gave him leave to take half a day off, I should like to know?

GERTRUDE. He said he had business in the West End.

EMILY. [*To Ned.*] Now if you want to make yourself useful as a cousin, please explain to these so-called parents that they oughtn't to spoil me one day, and rule me with a rod of iron the next. It's not fair. It's very bad for my disposition.

NED. [*To John.*] Is this man-about-town the same Preece you were telling me of?

EMILY. There you are, you see! He tells every one about Mr Preece. He's as proud as Punch of Mr Preece.

JOHN. [*More kindly.*] Arthur Preece is a youth that I discovered in my drawing office. Last year I took out a patent for him for bending metal plates at a low temperature; and it's attracted some attention. But our relations are purely business.

GERTRUDE. Still, it was you who first asked him to the house.

JOHN. [*Dryly.*] It was. And Rose kept him for tea. It's all our fault as usual. However—[*rising*—you'll kindly tell

Master Preece that you can't give yourselves the pleasure of his society this afternoon.

EMILY. But why?

JOHN. [*Continuing.*] And if he's obstreperous, inform him that I am in my study, and rather anxious to know exactly what his business in the West End is.

EMILY. [*Insisting.*] But why, father?

JOHN. [*Firmly.*] Simply because your mother and I wish you to be in this afternoon. Uncle Sam and Aunt Nancy are coming, for one thing.

EMILY. [*Disdainfully.*] Uncle Sam! Aunt Nancy!

ROSE. Emily! I won't have you bandying words with your father; you seem to have lost all sense of respect.

EMILY. [*To Ned, angrily.*] Aren't they tyrants!

[*She goes to a little table and takes off her bonnet, in a quick annoyed way.*]

ROSE. [*Very politely and nicely to Gertrude.*] Gertrude, if you aren't going out, could you come into the study about those addresses?

GERTRUDE. [*Somewhat snappishly, taking Emily's bonnet.*] Of course! [*She goes out quickly.*]

JOHN. [*To Ned.*] Well, you've got to be off then, for the moment.

[*All are near the door now, except Emily, who is drawing off her gloves savagely.*]

ROSE. [*In a low voice to Ned.*] Till tea, then.

[*She goes out, nodding her head significantly.*]

NED. [*Hesitating.*] Yes. [*To John.*] But I must just kiss the hand of this new cousin of mine first.

JOHN. [*In a peculiar tone.*] Oh! All right! [*He follows Rose.*]

NED. [*Going up to Emily, whose face is turned away, ingratiatingly.*]

Now, I'm not included in this frown, am I?

EMILY. [*Facing him and bursting out.*] But don't you think it's a shame, seriously?

NED. Of course if you've promised Mr Preece, and don't want to disappoint him——

EMILY. [*With false lightness.*] Oh, Mr Preece is nothing to me! Only I do want to know where I am. The fact is they let me do as I like in little things, and they're frightfully severe in big things. Not really big things, but—you know——

NED. Middling big things.

EMILY. After all, I'm twenty-two.

NED. A mature age.

EMILY. [*Huffily.*] Oh! Naturally you take their side!



NED. Honour bright, I don't! I tell you I feel far more like your age than theirs. I'm much younger than your father—much! That's why I don't like being called uncle.

EMILY. Really?

NED. Really.

EMILY. [*Confidentially.*] And there's another thing. They oughtn't to treat Auntie Gertrude like that, ought they? She's got more brains than anybody else here.

NED. Than your father?

EMILY. No, not than father. I meant mother, and Uncle Sam, and me—and you——

NED. I see.

EMILY. Who is it runs the house? You don't suppose it's mother, do you? Mother is absorbed in father, quite absorbed in him. No! It's auntie does everything. And yet she's nobody, simply nobody. She arranges to take me out, and they stop it without so much as apologizing to her.

NED. Well, you see, she's an old maid.

EMILY. I don't care whether she's an old maid or not. She's the only friend I have. Father and mother are most awfully fond of me and all that, and mother *is* sweet, isn't she? But still that makes no difference. There are two camps in this house; they're in one, and auntie and I are in the other. And I tell you we have to be regular conspirators, in self-defence. Of course I'm trusting you.

NED. [*Who has been playing with a book he has picked up from a table.*] You may.

EMILY. For instance, they won't let me read Ouida. They don't even like auntie to read Ouida.

NED. This isn't Ouida.

EMILY. I know it isn't. That's William Black. They're always throwing William Black at me, and I hate him. I want to read Ouida.

NED. You must wait till you're married.

EMILY. I won't. And I do so want to go to the Hotel Métropole.

NED. I thought it was the Royal Academy.

EMILY. The Academy too.

NED. Look here, Emily. Suppose I arrange a little theatre party?

EMILY. Not with father and mother. They'll want to go to something silly.

NED. No. Just your auntie and me—and you, of course.

EMILY. Will you?

NED. Rather!

EMILY. You're quite coming out. But will they allow it?

NED. You bet they will.

EMILY. Where?

NED. Anywhere you like.

EMILY. Do you know *The Mikado*'s been running three months, and I haven't seen it yet?

NED. [*Humming.*] 'Here's a how-d'ye-do!' The Savoy, then.

EMILY. Oh! Hurrah! Hurrah! Thanks; you are a dear.

NED. [*Pleased.*] Am I? That's all right, then. *Au revoir.*

[*Turns to the door.*]

EMILY. [*Calling him back.*] Cousin! [*She beckons him to come to her.*] What's this secret between you and father and mother?

NED. What secret?

EMILY. [*Crossly.*] Now you needn't pretend. I could see it as plain as anything when I came in. And when they went out too, for that matter.

NED. I can't stand being bullied.

EMILY. Tell me, and I won't bully you.

NED. [*Solemnly.*] You're going to be related to a baronet.

EMILY. [*Disturbed.*] They don't want me to marry a baronet, do they?

NED. Foolish creature! No. It's the opposite camp that's about to receive a title.

EMILY. [*Delighted.*] Father—a baronet!

NED. I'm just off to make the final arrangements now.

EMILY. Truly?

NED. Don't be misled by my modest exterior. I'm a terrific nob—really. [*He turns to go.*]

EMILY. [*As he is going.*] Didn't you say something about kissing my hand? One of your jokes, I suppose.

[*Ned comes and kisses it, then hurries to the door. As he opened it he looks back and says 'The Mikado,' and hurries out. Emily stands a moment lost in thought, a smile on her lips. Then she hums, quite unconsciously, 'For he's going to marry Yum-Yum, Yum-Yum!' Goes back to the table on which the William Black is lying, picks it up—opens it, reading a bit, then flings the book aside, muttering in disgust, 'Black!'*]

*Thompson enters. He has grown old in the service of the Rheads.*

THOMPSON. [*Announcing.*] Mr Preece. [*He withdraws.*]

[*Arthur Preece enters. His age is twenty-five; he is a man of*



*the clerk class, whose talent and energy have made him what he is. He is full of enthusiasm, earnest, but with a rough sense of humour. Rather short and stocky in figure, but important. His clothes are neat and useful—but very simple.*

PREECE. [*Excited.*] Good afternoon, Miss Rhead. I'm afraid I'm a little early.

EMILY. [*Putting on the manner of a woman of the world.*] Not at all, Mr Preece. I'm sure Auntie Gertrude will be delighted.

PREECE. [*Vaguely.*] She's not here now, your aunt?

EMILY. [*Looking round.*] No.

PREECE. [*Eagerly.*] I wonder if I should have time to tell you something before she comes in. It isn't that it's a secret. But nobody knows yet, and I should like you to be the first.

EMILY. How very kind of you, Mr Preece!

PREECE. I've only just known it myself.

EMILY. It seems to be very thrilling.

PREECE. It is, rather. It's just this. I've succeeded in making mild steel nearly five per cent lighter than it's ever been made before. Nearly five per cent lighter, and no extra cost.

EMILY. Really! How much is five per cent?

PREECE. It's one-twentieth part. You know, it's enormous.

EMILY. I suppose it is.

PREECE. I dare say you don't quite realize what it means—this enormous change in the specific gravity. But it is enormous.

EMILY. What is specific gravity? In a word?

PREECE. It's—well—— Now supposing—— Do you mind if I explain that to you some other time? I'd like to, awfully!

EMILY. Oh! Any time!

PREECE. It's quite O.K., you know. And the thing comes to this. Assume the steel for a biggish ship costs £20,000. Under my new process you'd get the same result with steel that weighed about a twentieth less and cost, roughly, £19,000. Net saving of nearly one thousand pounds!

EMILY. [*Impressed.*] And did you——?

PREECE. [*Continuing.*] And not only that. As the hull weighs so much less, you can carry a proportionately heavier cargo in the same bottom.

EMILY. Well, I never heard of such a thing! And am I really the first to know?

PREECE. You are.

EMILY. And you found out this all alone?

PREECE. Oh, yes! Except the manager, nobody has any idea of what I've been experimenting on.

EMILY. Not even father?

PREECE. No.

EMILY. I suppose he knows you *are* experimenting.

PREECE. Of course. That's my job. That's what he took me out of the drawing office for. I'm always experimenting on something.

EMILY. I expect you're what they call an inventor.

PREECE. [*Humorously.*] I expect I am. [*Eagerly.*] I'd practically finished this experiment a week ago. But I had to make sure whether there was any manganese left in the steel. I've been getting a friend at the City and Guilds of London Institute to analyse it for me—you know, the big, red building in Exhibition Road. I've just come from there.

EMILY. So *that* was your business in the West End? [*Preece nods.*] I'm sure auntie and I hadn't an idea it was anything half so romantic.

PREECE. It *is* romantic, isn't it?

EMILY. No wonder you're so excited.

PREECE. Am I? Well, I don't care! It's all right. That's all I care about. Here's a bit of the steel now.

[*He offers her a small sample.*]

EMILY. Is it for me? May I keep it?

PREECE. I want you to.

EMILY. Rather a strange thing for a girl to keep, isn't it?

PREECE. You don't mind——?

EMILY. I'd part with all my jewellery before I parted with this. D'you know, it makes me feel very proud. And when I think of poor old father not knowing anything about it——

PREECE. I shall tell him to-morrow if he can spare time to see me.

EMILY. Spare time to see *you*—why?

PREECE. Oh! you don't know, but Mr Rhead's a sort of crowned head on the works. You can't walk into his office as if it was a public-house, I can tell you.

EMILY. But it's so important for him.

PREECE. Rather! Much more important for him than for me.

EMILY. Why?

PREECE. Under our agreement! Our agreement has five years to run yet, and during that time everything I do belongs to the firm. I only get a percentage on whatever my inventions bring in.



EMILY. What percentage?

PREECE. Ten. For every hundred pounds profit I get ten pounds and the firm gets ninety.

EMILY. But what a frightful shame! It ought to be the other way about—you ninety pounds and the firm ten.

PREECE. Oh, no! It's fair enough—really! They pay me a very good salary. And you must remember if Mr Rhead hadn't taken me out of the drawing office, I should be there now getting two pounds a week!

EMILY. I don't care! I think it's a frightful shame. I shall tell father.

PREECE. [*Half playfully.*] Please don't, unless you want to ruin me with him. I owe just about everything to your father.

EMILY. But it's so horridly unfair.

PREECE. Oh, no! I assure you. I shall have all the money I want, and more. And it will always be *my* invention. That's the point.

EMILY. Then you don't care for money?

PREECE. Yes, I do. I want enough. In fact, I want a good deal. But what's interesting is to *do* things, and to do 'em better and quicker and less clumsily than ever they were done before. If I can make nineteen tons of steel do the work of twenty—well, I reckon I've accomplished something for the world.

EMILY. I like that. It's very original.

PREECE. Not my notion, you know. I'm a disciple of William Morris.

EMILY. Oh! He's a poet, isn't he?

PREECE. You should read *The Earthly Paradise*.

EMILY. I should love to.

PREECE. If people would read a bit more William Morris, and less of these silly gimcrack novels about lords and actresses—Ouida and so on—— What's the matter?

EMILY. Nothing. [*With a certain self-satisfaction.*] William Black's silly too, isn't he?

PREECE. Of course.

EMILY. [*Firmly.*] I'm going to read *The Earthly Paradise*.

PREECE. Let me lend it you. I've got a signed copy, from the author.

EMILY. You know an author!

PREECE. I know William Morris. I was up at his stable last night.

EMILY. His stable?

PREECE. He gives lectures in a stable behind his house at Hammersmith. I wish you'd heard him pitching into the House of Lords. 'A squad of dukes.'

EMILY. But why?

PREECE. Oh, because they aren't interested in the right thing.

EMILY. What is the right thing?

PREECE. The right thing is to make the world fit to live in.

EMILY. But isn't it?

PREECE. Have you ever been to the East End?

EMILY. I did some slumming once, just to see. But I was so ashamed to go into their awful houses, that I never tried again.

PREECE. [*Getting up, excited.*] That's grand! That's grand! That's just how I feel. Every one feels like that that's got any imagination and any sense of justice. We *ought* to be ashamed of the East End. At least the governing classes ought. Not for the poor, but for themselves. They ought to go and get buried if they can't govern better than that.

EMILY. [*After a pause, rising as in thought; moved.*] But how are you going to change it?

PREECE. Not by slumming, that's a certainty. You can only change it by getting some decent laws passed, and by playing fair, and doing your job, and thinking a great deal less about eating and drinking, and fine clothes, and being in the swim, and all that sort of nonsense. Do you know what I am going to do as soon as I can afford? I'm going to be a Member of Parliament.

EMILY. [*Low.*] Why did you offer to take us to the Hotel Métropole?

PREECE. [*Confused.*] I thought you'd like it. I—I——

EMILY. You despise it yourself.

PREECE. I'm human.

EMILY. But——

[*She draws close to him.*]

PREECE. I'm very ambitious. I want a whole lot of things. But if I thought I could find someone—find a woman, who—who feels as I feel; who'd like before everything to help to make the world decent—I'd——

EMILY. I——

[*Profoundly stirred, she falls into his arms.*]

PREECE. Emily!

[*He kisses her long, holding her close.*]

EMILY. [*Gently releases herself and walks away. With effort.*] I haven't told you. I forgot. Father doesn't wish me to go out with you this afternoon. He's here now, in the study.



*Gertrude enters from the hall, without her bonnet this time.*

GERTRUDE. Good afternoon, Mr Preece. [*They shake hands. To Emily.*] I suppose you—er—told Mr Preece that the excursion is countermanded? [*She goes to the fireplace.*

EMILY. Yes. Mr Preece was just going. [*Gently.*] Good afternoon. [*She holds out her hand to Preece, who hesitates. Emily repeats in firmer tone.*] Good afternoon. [*In a tender voice.*] Please! [*With a smile.*] Another time!

[*Preece shakes hands and, bowing to Gertrude, retires. As he departs Gertrude rings the bell by the fireplace.*

GERTRUDE. Well, I've been catching it, I can tell you!

EMILY. [*Shaken.*] What about?

GERTRUDE. About you. They simply asked me to go into the study so that I could be talked to—for your good, my girl.

EMILY. They weren't rude, were they?

GERTRUDE. You know your mother's always most considerate. She's an angel. But your father rubbed it in finely. How many times had you seen the young man?—If ever alone?—What on earth was I thinking of?—What on earth was your mother doing to have noticed nothing? (As if your mother ever noticed anything!) And so on! Of course, I told them pretty straight that they were making a most ridiculous fuss about nothing.

EMILY. Well, anyhow, I've let him kiss me.

GERTRUDE. You've let him kiss you?—When?

EMILY. Just now. Here.

GERTRUDE. But what——?

EMILY. Don't ask me. I don't know, I really don't. But I've felt it coming for some time.

GERTRUDE. Do you mean to say he walked in here and proposed to you straight off, and you accepted him?

EMILY. I didn't accept him, because he didn't propose. He was talking about his ideas.

GERTRUDE. What ideas?

EMILY. [*With a vague gesture.*] Oh, about the world in general, and all that he means to do. He's made another marvellous invention, only no one knows except me. It was the excited way he talked—somehow—I couldn't help it—before I knew what we were doing, he'd got his arms round me.

GERTRUDE. [*Rather sternly, in spite of her tender feeling.*] Well, Emily, I must say I'm very surprised.

EMILY. So am I.

GERTRUDE. Of course you 're engaged to him?

EMILY. Am I?

GERTRUDE. And it 'll be all my fault. However, it 's got to be seen through to the end now.

EMILY. He has very strange ideas. They sound splendid when he 's explaining them. But d' you know, he thinks Ouida 's silly.

GERTRUDE. Does he?

EMILY. And he really doesn't care about money and fashion and all that sort of thing. He despises going to the Hotel Métropole. He only offered to go there because he thought it would please our horrid little minds—I was so ashamed.

GERTRUDE. But surely you knew all this before—at least you guessed it?

EMILY. I didn't, auntie. I never thought about his ideas, never! I just——

GERTRUDE. You just simply fell into his arms as soon as you heard them, that 's all. Well, surely in that case, you must admire these ideas of his tremendously.

[*She sits in an arm-chair.*]

EMILY. I don't know. Yes. I *admire* them, but——

GERTRUDE. Listen, young woman! Are you in love with him, or aren't you?

EMILY. I—I—— How can you tell whether you 're in love with a man or not?

GERTRUDE. Supposing you were alone with him here, now—would you let him kiss you again? [Pause.]

EMILY. I——

GERTRUDE. Now, out with it!

EMILY. I shouldn't be able to stop him, should I?

GERTRUDE. That 's enough.

EMILY. Yes. But then what about father? He would be frightfully angry, I can see that. Oh, I do hate unpleasantness, auntie. And Mr Preece's ideas are really very peculiar.

GERTRUDE. [*After a look at Emily.*] Listen, Emily! I was once engaged to be married.

EMILY. Oh, auntie! I always knew you must have been. Do tell me. Who was it?

GERTRUDE. Your Uncle Sam.

EMILY. [*Staggered.*] Not Uncle Sam?

GERTRUDE. You 're surprised, naturally. But you mustn't be too hard. Remember it was twenty-five years ago, Uncle Sam was a splendid fellow then. He 's old now. We 're all

old, except you—and Mr Preece. You've got the only thing worth having, you two.

EMILY. [*Sitting at Gertrude's feet.*] What's that?

GERTRUDE. Youth. Your Uncle Sam lived the miserable life of a bachelor till he was fifty. He'd have been a very different man if I'd married him. And I should have been a very different woman.

EMILY. Why did you break it off?

GERTRUDE. I broke it off because there were difficulties; and because I thought his ideas were peculiar; and because I hated unpleasantness! And now look at me! Couldn't I have ruled a house and a family? Couldn't I have played the hostess? [*In another tone.*] To-day the one poor little joy I have in life is to pretend I'm your mother. Look at my position here. I'm only——

EMILY. [*Passionately.*] Oh, auntie, don't! I can't bear to hear you say it. I know!

GERTRUDE. We were opposites in every way, your uncle and I, but I—I loved him.

EMILY. [*Softly.*] Do you still love him, auntie?

GERTRUDE. [*In a flat tone of despair.*] No! Love dies out.

EMILY. [*After a moment.*] Why didn't you marry somebody else?

GERTRUDE. There *was* nobody else. There never is anybody else when you've made the mistake I made. Marry! I could have chosen among a dozen men! But they were all the wrong men. Emily! Fancy pouring out tea every day of your life for the wrong man. Every breakfast time—every afternoon! And there he sits, and nothing will move him. Think of that, Emily—think of that. [*A pause.*]

EMILY. [*Embracing her again.*] Oh, auntie! I love you awfully!

GERTRUDE. You must show some courage, my girl. Don't be afraid of anything—and especially not of arguments and threats. What does unpleasantness matter, after all? It's over in a month; but a mistake lasts for ever.

EMILY. You'll help me?

GERTRUDE. That's all I live for. [*She kisses Emily tenderly.*]  
Is that Sam's voice?

*Thompson enters.*

THOMPSON. [*Announcing.*] Mr and Mrs Sibley. [*He retires.*]

[*Samuel Sibley and his wife Nancy enter. Samuel, who is now fifty-three, has grown into a rather flabby nonentity, grey-*



*haired with longish side whiskers and glasses. His manner is important and fussy. Nancy is a buxom Yorkshire woman of thirty-two, round-faced, good-natured, full of energy. She wears the fashionable jersey of 1885 and a very definite 'bustle.'*

SAM. Well, Gertrude! Well, my little Emmie!

*[He kisses Emily, who gives her cheek unwillingly; then shakes hands with Gertrude.]*

GERTRUDE. How are you, Sam; and you, Mrs Sam?

NANCY. Nicely, thank you! *[Shaking hands vigorously with Gertrude and Emily.]* Everybody well, here?

EMILY. Yes, thank you.

NANCY. That's fine! Then your mother got Sam's letter saying we were coming?

EMILY. *[Dryly.]* Oh, yes!

NANCY. I said to Sam it would happen be best to write and tell you. So he wrote—*[with a look at Sam]*—finally.

SAM. *[With a serious tone.]* We nearly didn't come.

GERTRUDE. Anything wrong?

SAM. Infant's temperature up at a hundred last night. However, it was normal this morning.

NANCY. You know he takes the baby's temperature every night.

EMILY. Oh, do you, uncle? How funny!

SAM. I don't see anything funny about it, niece. Good thing if some parents took their responsibilities a bit more seriously.

NANCY. I must say Sam makes a very good father.

GERTRUDE. Let me see—how old is Dickie now?

SAM. We never call him Dickie—Richard, better; less nonsensical. *[He settles down solemnly in a chair.]*

NANCY. You've no idea what I call him when you're not there, Sam! *[To Gertrude.]* He was two on the second of this month. He talks like anything! You ought to see him and his father together. It's killing! The little thing's so *exactly* like Sam.

EMILY. *[Examining Sam.]* Is he? We must go down to Brockley, mustn't we, auntie?

NANCY. *[Dryly.]* I've been expecting you for the better part of some time. *[Then cordially.]* I should love you to come as soon as I've got a new cook. *[With emphasis.]* Oh, my!

GERTRUDE. Are you having trouble?

NANCY. Trouble's not the word. And as for the nurse-maid! If it wasn't for Sam being free——

GERTRUDE. D'you take your share, Sam?

NANCY. By the hour he wheels that child up and down.

EMILY. Not in the street?

SAM. Why not, niece? Anything to be ashamed of in being a father?

NANCY. That's what we came up for to-day, to buy a new perambulator. He did try to repair the other in the little workshop he's made himself at the end of the garden—and most useful he is for odd jobs. Upon my word, he's busy from morning to night! But we thought it better to buy a new pram altogether.

SAM. [*Discontented.*] Nancy would insist on having one of those new things with indiarubber tyres, as they call them.

NANCY. [*Very definitely.*] Now, Sam. I thought we'd done with that question.

SAM. Yes; but rubber tyres on gravel paths! It's obvious they'll not last a——

NANCY. I told you Mrs Caton across the road told me——

SAM. Oh, very well! Very well! Only it's very light and flimsy.

EMILY. [*Restless.*] I think I'll go and tell father and mother you're here. [*Going towards the door.*]

NANCY. [*Rising, very convinced.*] Come and see for yourself what you think of the pram and the rubber tyres.

EMILY. Is it here?

NANCY. Yes, in the hall.

SAM. I deemed it imprudent to let them send it down by train. So we brought it away on the roof of a four-wheeler.

EMILY. [*Patronizingly.*] Well, let's go and inspect it, Aunt Nancy. [*Emily and Nancy go off.*]

GERTRUDE. [*Waiting till the door is closed; in low, quiet tones.*] Sam, I'm so glad you've come. There's going to be another tragedy in this house, if some of us don't do something.

SAM. *Another* tragedy? What do you mean?

GERTRUDE. I just mean a tragedy. That child's head over heels in love with young Arthur Preece, at the works, and John simply won't hear of it.

SAM. Why?

GERTRUDE. [*Shrugs her shoulders.*] Why, indeed? Sam, if there's any discussion while you're here I want you to help me all you can.

SAM. But really, Gertrude, how can I meddle in an affair like that? I have my own responsibilities.

GERTRUDE. Sam, it's many years since I asked the slightest favour of you.



SAM. [*Moved, friendly.*] Come, come. Don't go so far back as all that. We're all very comfortable as we are, I think.

[*The door opens.*]

GERTRUDE. [*Quick and low.*] But will you? You've got more influence than I have.

SAM. [*Low.*] All right. [*Pats her arm.*] All right.

*Enter Rose and John.*

JOHN. [*Coming up to Sam a little patronizingly.*] Sam, glad to see you! How's the precious family getting on? Any new trouble lately?

SAM. [*A little sharply.*] Oh, no! And what about yours? [*In a significant, bantering tone.*] Any new trouble lately?

JOHN. Mine? Trouble? No!

ROSE. [*Kissing Sam fondly.*] Your wife's here?

SAM. She's downstairs somewhere——

JOHN. [*Interrupting sharply.*] Where's Emily?

GERTRUDE. She's just gone with Mrs Sam to look at a new perambulator——

JOHN. [*Interrupting again.*] Preece hasn't been, has he?

GERTRUDE. He's been and gone.

JOHN. Were you here?

GERTRUDE. I was here part of the time.

JOHN. You ought to have been here all the time. What did you tell him?

GERTRUDE. Emily told him you wished us to stay at home this afternoon.

JOHN. [*Nodding curtly.*] So much for that.

SAM. So even *you* are not quite without 'em, Jack?

JOHN. Not quite without what?

SAM. Family troubles.

JOHN. What in heaven's name are you driving at?

SAM. Nothing. I only gathered from your tone that Preece was considered—er—dangerous.

JOHN. [*Hedging.*] Oh, no! I'm merely taking precautions. Preece is an excellent fellow in his way—brilliant even.

SAM. But you wouldn't care for him as a son-in-law.

JOHN. [*Positively.*] I should not.

ROSE. [*Shaking her head.*] No!

SAM. I've always understood he had a great career before him.

JOHN. So he has, undoubtedly. You should see what he's got me to do at the works. Made me install the telephone. And



his latest is that he wants me to put down an electric light plant. What do you think of that?

SAM. He must be very enthusiastic.

GERTRUDE. I should think he just is!

JOHN. Why, the boy's invention mad. He thinks of nothing else.

SAM. Well, if you ask me I'd sooner have that kind of madness than most kinds I meet with. Seems to me people have gone mad on bicycles or banjo-playing or this lawn-tennis, as it's called. It was different in our day, Jack, when young men took an interest in volunteering and the defence of their country. I've quite decided when our boy grows up——

GERTRUDE. [*Putting a hand on Sam's arm.*] Sam!—Emily may be back any moment. We were talking about Arthur Preece.

SAM. So we were. [*Turns again to John.*] Well, Jack——

JOHN. [*Annoyed.*] Look here, Sam—I don't mind being frank with you. Her mother and I have somebody else in view for Emily.

SAM. Oh!

GERTRUDE. [*Bitterly.*] I thought as much. [*A slight pause.*]

JOHN. [*Carelessly to Sam.*] Have you heard I'm going to have a title?

SAM. No! What title?

JOHN. Baronet.

GERTRUDE. [*Quickly.*] You never told me.

ROSE. [*Soothingly.*] It only came out this afternoon, Gertrude dear.

SAM. Oh—ho!

JOHN. [*Still with an affectation of carelessness.*] And what's more, Emily can marry—under the very happiest auspices—into the peerage. That's why we don't want her to see too much of young Preece.

SAM. And may one ask who is the peer?

JOHN. Monkhurst, of course.

SAM. Ned!

GERTRUDE. Ned?

ROSE. Wouldn't it be ideal, Sam?

SAM. He's keen—Ned?

JOHN. Very! Put that in your pipe and smoke it, my boy.

[*Emily and Nancy re-enter rather suddenly. All the others have a self-conscious air.*]

JOHN. [*Rather negligently.*] Well, Nancy. How are you? It seems the infant's grown out of his pram. [*Shakes hands.*]

NANCY. [*Rather proud of being able to call the great man 'John,' and yet trying to not be proud.*] Glad to see you, John.

[*Rose and Nancy embrace. An awkward pause.*]

EMILY. [*With suspicion.*] What's the matter here? More secrets?

GERTRUDE. [*In an outburst.*] It's being arranged that you are to marry Lord Monkhurst.

JOHN. [*Nonplussed, coldly angry.*] Gertrude, are you stark staring mad—blurting things out like that?

ROSE. [*Shocked.*] Gertrude, dear—really!

GERTRUDE. [*Firmly.*] She'd better know, hadn't she?

JOHN. You——

NANCY. [*Blandly.*] Well, anyhow, the fat's in the fire now, isn't it, John?

JOHN. [*Turning to Nancy.*] Sorry you've been let in for a bit of a scene, Nancy.

NANCY. [*Cheerfully.*] Oh! Don't mind me. I know what family life is—my word! I'm from Yorkshire! Best to have it out fair and square—that's my experience.

SAM. That's what she always says when the infant's obstreperous. Why, the night before last, just as we were getting off to sleep——

JOHN. There's nothing to have out!

GERTRUDE. Oh, yes, there is. Emily's in love with Arthur Preece.

JOHN. What's this?

EMILY. [*Very nervous; to Gertrude.*] What do you mean—it's being arranged for me to marry Lord Monkhurst? Me—marry old Ned!

JOHN. He's not old.

EMILY. Isn't he old enough to be my father?

JOHN. Certainly not.

SAM. [*Mischievously.*] I doubt it.

JOHN. [*Turning on him.*] You're the last man to talk about difference of age between husband and wife.

ROSE. [*Smoothing over the awkwardness.*] But you're very happy, aren't you, dear?

SAM. Naturally.

NANCY. I don't see that age matters—so long as people really fancy each other. I'm sure Sam gets younger every day.

JOHN. Of course! [*Turning to Emily angrily.*] What's this tale about you being in love with Preece?

EMILY. I——

JOHN. Has he been proposing to you?

EMILY. No.

JOHN. [*Disdainfully.*] Then how can you be in love with him?

EMILY. [*Resenting his tone.*] Well, I *am* in love with him, if you want to know, father.

JOHN. You have the audacity——

NANCY. Come, John, it's not a crime.

JOHN. Preece is not of our class at all. It's a gross mistake to marry out of your class.

NANCY. [*Bantering.*] Now, John, that's not very tactful, seeing that Sam married out of *his* class.

SAM. Don't be foolish, Nan! I married a lady. Even a marquis couldn't do more.

JOHN. My dear Nancy, you belong to the family—that's enough! Preece is quite a different affair. Just a common clerk until I——

EMILY. I can't see what more you want. He has the most beautiful manners, and, as for money, he'll make lots.

JOHN. How will he make lots?

EMILY. With his inventions. You haven't heard about his latest. But I have. He's told me. Here it is.

[*Hands piece of steel to her father.*]

JOHN. [*Taking it.*] And what's this?

EMILY. I don't know exactly. But it's very wonderful. It's steel, I think—a new kind.

JOHN. [*Dryly.*] Yes. I see it's steel.

EMILY. And I think it's a great shame for you to take nine-tenths of all the money from his inventions, and for *him* to only have one-tenth.

JOHN. [*Flashing up.*] What? Has he been whining to you in that style?

EMILY. [*Passionately.*] No, he hasn't been whining to me in that style. He hasn't been whining at all. He thought it was quite fair. It only came out by pure accident, and I promised I'd never breathe a word. You must forget what I've said.

JOHN. I'll teach him——

EMILY. [*More passionately.*] If you ever say a single thing, father, I'll run away and never come back.

ROSE. Child! please! [*She tries to soothe her.*]

SAM. [*To calm the stress.*] Hand over, Jack. [*Takes the piece of steel and looks at it.*] I fully admit I was wrong about iron. But even *you* won't prophesy that steel's going to take the place of iron for ships!



JOHN. [*Shortly.*] I don't think it is on *my* works. But, as for prophesying—I don't prophesy. Heaven knows no one can accuse me of being conservative in my ideas. But I must say the new generation seems to be going clean off its head. If one of those up-to-date inventors came along and told me he'd made a flying-machine, I should keep my nerve. I shouldn't blench.

SAM. Good! Good!

GERTRUDE. Now you're at flying-machines! What have flying-machines got to do with Emily's happiness? If she wants to marry young Preece——

EMILY. Yes, if I want to marry him, why shouldn't I?

ROSE. Because your father objects.

EMILY. Oh, mother! Didn't you marry father, in spite of every one?

JOHN. Who's told you that?

EMILY. I know.

[*General glances at Gertrude.*]

ROSE. [*Indignant.*] Do you mean to compare young Preece with your father?

EMILY. Why not? You loved father, and I——

JOHN. I'll tell you why not. I was independent. I was my own master. Young Mr Preece isn't. That's why.

GERTRUDE. [*Sarcastically.*] Surely it's a free country—for men!

JOHN. It's not a country where honest men break their contracts. Young Preece can't patent an invention without me. Can't do any thing without me. If I like, I can force him to mark time for five years, five solid years.

EMILY. Does that mean that if I married him in spite of you——

ROSE. [*Horried.*] Child! Well may you say we've spoilt you!

JOHN. [*Calmly.*] It means that if he had the impudence to marry you, I'd scotch him—that I would!

EMILY. But why? Who's going to suffer? How can my marriage affect anybody but me?

JOHN. Don't talk like a little fool. Your marriage is the most important thing in the whole world to your mother and me. And if you persist in doing something against our will, I shall retaliate—that's all.

EMILY. [*With a despairing gesture.*] I can't make out your objections to Mr Preece. Why, he's a genius; every one knows he's a genius.

JOHN. And what if he is? Are geniuses to be the kings of the earth? Not quite! Geniuses have to be kept in order—like criminals. If there's one thing above all to be said in favour



of the English character, it is that we've known the proper way to treat geniuses.

SAM. I'm inclined to agree with you there.

JOHN. [*To Emily.*] Oh, it isn't Preece's class I object to. He's presentable enough. The whole truth is he's a highly dangerous sort of young man we're breeding in these days. He—he makes you feel—uncomfortable. On the works, under discipline, admirable. Outside the works—no, no, and no! I've been following Master Preece's activities far more closely than he thinks. He little guesses I know he's a Socialist!

SAM. A Socialist! Good God! Gertrude, you never told me that. A Socialist!

GERTRUDE. Why are men always so frightened by names?

JOHN. A Socialist. [*To Emily, an ultimatum.*] And I don't intend you to marry him. If you do, you ruin him. That's the long and short of it. Now, Emily, have we heard the last of Preece—or not?

ROSE. [*To Emily.*] Darling!

GERTRUDE. I really think you ought——

JOHN. [*Curtly.*] Pardon me, Gertrude. This isn't your affair. It's my daughter's.

GERTRUDE. [*To Emily.*] Your father is right. It's your affair. It depends solely on you.

EMILY. [*Weeping imploringly.*] What am I to do, auntie?

[*Gertrude turns away with a movement of pain and disgust.*]

EMILY. I don't want to make everybody miserable.

GERTRUDE. [*Reproachfully.*] Oh, Emily!

EMILY. I couldn't stand—in Mr Preece's light! I couldn't.

JOHN. There! There! Of course you couldn't.

ROSE. [*Comforting her.*] My poor lamb!

JOHN. And don't go and suppose I want to compel you to marry Monkhurst—or anybody. You're absolutely free.

GERTRUDE. [*Sniffs audibly.*] H'm!

JOHN. [*Glaring at Gertrude, to Emily.*] Only, as your aunt has dragged in his name, I don't see any harm in telling you this much. He adores you. We all like him. His wife will have a position second to none in London society. But don't let that influence you. Take him or refuse him as you please; your mother and I won't complain.

ROSE. Indeed we shan't, my love.

JOHN. Still, a marriage like this is not to be sneezed at. Is it, Emily? [*Pause.*] I say, is it?

EMILY. [*Trying to smile; weakly.*] No.

JOHN. [*Continuing.*] Not that I think it wouldn't be a big slice of luck for Monkhurst, too! There's only one Emily! [*He pats her.*] And then my title——

NANCY. Your title, John?

JOHN. [*Carelessly.*] Haven't you heard?

NANCY. No!

JOHN. [*As above.*] Baronetcy!

NANCY. [*Staggered.*] Wonders 'll never cease. [*To Rose.*] What a pity you've got no son, dear!

ROSE. [*With a trace of bitterness.*] Don't crow over us, dear!

[*She clasps Emily to her.*]

SAM. [*With a sigh of regret for himself.*] Well, well! And I've retired into private life!

JOHN. [*Surveying him patronizingly.*] And you've retired into private life. You're safe at Bröckley. But then you see you hadn't got a bee in your bonnet.

SAM. [*Accepting the sarcasm with a foolish smile.*] Well, well!

NANCY. [*Sharply.*] I don't see that there's any need for so much well-welling.

JOHN. Come and give your father a kiss, Em. [*Emily obeys.*]

GERTRUDE. [*Rising as Emily does so, full of emotion.*] I——

[*Thompson enters, followed by a Footman. They bring in tea.*]

*Gertrude pulls herself together. There is a slight pause while the Servants arrange the tea-things. They leave the room.*

ROSE. Emily, dear, will you pour out?

EMILY. [*Demurely.*] Yes, mother.

ROSE. I hope Ned won't be late.

NANCY. Is Lord Monkhurst coming for tea?

ROSE. He promised to.

NANCY. Oh, dear! If I'd known I was going to meet him——

[*She rises and arranges her bustle and the draperies of her skirt.*]

I do hope he won't notice that pram. A pram in a hall looks so common. [*She reseats herself.*]

*Thompson enters.*

THOMPSON. [*Announcing.*] Lord Monkhurst!

[*He retires.*]

GERTRUDE. [*Passionately.*] Here's your lord!

*Ned enters rapidly.*

NED. Well, kind friends. Hullo, Sam!

SAM. Hullo, Ned! [*They shake hands.*] By the way, my wife——

Nancy, Lord Monkhurst.

[*Nancy, flustered, bows.*]

NED. [*Going towards Emily.*] Delighted! Any of that tea for me?

GERTRUDE. [*With great feeling.*] And there's your tea—your daily tea, for the rest of your life!

JOHN. [*Angrily.*] Gertrude!

GERTRUDE. No, I will speak! Ned, what would *you* do, if I told you that——

EMILY. [*Pleading.*] Aunt Gertrude, please——

GERTRUDE. Emily!

EMILY. [*Weakly.*] It's all right, auntie.

GERTRUDE. All right? Oh, very well! [*Desperately.*] What's the use? [*She turns and walks quickly out of the room.*]

NED. [*Surprised at Gertrude's tone.*] What's the matter with dear Gertrude?

JOHN. Nothing. One of her moods. [*Drawing up a chair, with authority.*] Now then, Emily—tea!

CURTAIN



## ACT III

1912

*The same drawing-room, but now, in 1912, it has undergone an entire change. All the old mid-Victorian furniture has been crowded out by furniture of later style. Changes of ornaments, etc. The lights are electric ; so is the bell by the fireplace.*

*It is a June evening, about half-past ten at night. Signs of festivity—flowers ; presents (in gold) are standing about. It is the evening of the golden wedding of John and Rose.*

*Webster, a smart, military-looking butler of forty, is arranging a tray of whisky and soda. The door to the hall opens, and a Footman enters.*

FOOTMAN. [*Announcing.*] Lord Monkhurst. [*He withdraws.*

[*Lord Monkhurst enters. He is a young man-about-town of twenty-two, tall, hollow-chested, careless in his manners, very self-assured, and properly bored.*

MONKHURST. I say, Webster.

WEBSTER. Good evening, my lord.

MONKHURST. [*Cheerfully.*] I suppose dinner's over?

WEBSTER. [*Looking at his watch.*] It's half-past ten, my lord.

MONKHURST. Of course, they'll all say I'm late for dinner.

WEBSTER. Oh, no, my lord. Shall I order some dinner for your lordship?

MONKHURST. No. Who's here now?

WEBSTER. Lady Monkhurst and Miss Muriel ; Miss Rhead, Mrs Samuel Sibley, and Mr Richard Sibley.

MONKHURST. Yes. I know *he's* here. Many people at the reception this afternoon?

WEBSTER. Drove, my lord.

MONKHURST. I suppose these ghastly things are the presents?

WEBSTER. As your lordship says.

MONKHURST. Dashed if I can understand why my grandfather should make such a fuss about his golden wedding. [*Very cheerfully.*] Was he very angry at me not turning up?

WEBSTER. Considering his age, no, my lord. I took the liberty of



suggesting to him that this might be one of your busy weeks, my lord, and that your lordship could never tell beforehand——

MONKHURST. You're a clever chap, Webster. Why the devil did you leave the army?

WEBSTER. Probably because, as your lordship says, I'm clever. There's more brains outside the army than in it, my lord. And like turns to like.

MONKHURST. [*Laughing in a superior way.*] Ha ha! Really!

WEBSTER. Fact is, I enlisted under a misapprehension, when I was in a temper. I have to thank your lordship's late father for helping me to re-enter my old profession, and under the most auspicious circumstances.

MONKHURST. Well, we could do with more fellahs like you. I've not yet found any sergeant to draw my sketch maps for me half as well as you used to.

[*He is looking over the tray of drinks.*]

WEBSTER. Ah, my lord! Those half-guineas came in very handy, very handy. Glorious times, no doubt. But I wouldn't go back.

MONKHURST. Bring me a benedictine, will you?

[*Emily, now Lady Monkhurst, forty-eight, enters by the double doors. She has developed into a handsome, well-preserved woman of the world. She wears an evening dress of rich brocade, and magnificent pearls.*]

MONKHURST. Well, mater, I don't see much sign of the fatted calf.

EMILY. [*Annoyed.*] Gerald, your poor father was witty; you're merely facetious. I wish you could cure yourself.

MONKHURST. Now, what's the matter now?

EMILY. What's the matter? You must needs choose your grandparents' golden wedding to go to Sandown. You promised me you'd be back early, at any rate in time for the tail end of the reception; and you don't even appear for dinner. Your grandfather is very displeased.

MONKHURST. If a fellow keeps a stable, he keeps a stable. Somebody's got to look after the gees in these days. And then——

[*Hesitates.*]

EMILY. Please don't tell me your car broke down. I've heard that too often.

MONKHURST. It didn't—this time.

EMILY. Have you dined?

MONKHURST. I have.

EMILY. Whom with? [*Silence.*] One of your numerous 'lady friends,' I presume. Gerald, I'm ashamed of you.

MONKHURST. You've no right to be ashamed of me. If you want to know, I dined at the House of Lords.

EMILY. At the House of Lords?

MONKHURST. At the House of Lords. They telephoned to me at Sandown to come up for an important division, and I was kept hanging about there till after ten o'clock. Jolly amusing place, the House of Lords.

EMILY. [*Rather taken aback.*] Why didn't you tell me at first?

MONKHURST. Because I just wanted to teach you a lesson, mater. You're always ragging me about something or other.

EMILY. You might at least have telephoned.

MONKHURST. When a chap's doing his duty to his country, he can't always think about telephoning.

EMILY. My dear Gerald, if you mean to follow in your father's footsteps, nobody will be more delighted than your mother. There'd be nothing to prevent you from being Master of the Horse, if you chose. Only, my chick——

MONKHURST. Only your what?

EMILY. You must alter you manner of living.

MONKHURST. My manner of living, my dear mater, is my own affair. [*With meaning.*] If you'd leave me alone, and look after your other 'chick' a little bit more——

EMILY. What do you mean? Muriel?

MONKHURST. Precisely. The Honourable Muriel.

EMILY. Why?

MONKHURST. Oh! I know Muriel can do no wrong. Still, I spotted her at the top of the stairs just now practically in the arms of the good Richard.

EMILY. Richard?

MONKHURST. [*Intoning.*] And Samuel took to wife Nancy, and begat Richard. And Samuel passed away in the fullness of years and his son Richard reigned in his stead. And Richard looked upon Muriel, and lo! she was beautiful in the eyes of Richard——

EMILY. Hush, Gerald! Aren't you mistaken? I've never seen the slightest thing——

MONKHURST. That shows how blind you are, then! Of course I'm not mistaken.

EMILY. Are you sure?

MONKHURST. Do you take me for a fool, mater?

EMILY. [*Positively.*] Richard, indeed! I shall put a stop to it.

MONKHURST. [*Almost savagely.*] I should jolly well think you would.

*Enter Webster from the hall with a liqueur on a salver.*

*Monkhurst takes it and drinks it slowly.*

EMILY. Webster, will you kindly ask Miss Muriel to come here?

WEBSTER. Very good, my lady.

[*He goes out. Monkhurst nods knowingly to his mother as if to say, 'Now you'll see!' Nancy enters by the double doors. She has grown into a rather red-faced, plump, old woman of fifty-eight. She is good-natured, but is quick to retort. Her laugh is rather loud, her manner more definite than ever.*]

NANCY. Good evening, young man.

MONKHURST. Good evening.

NANCY. So you've come at——

EMILY. [*Interrupting her.*] Aunt Nancy, I've just had to send for Muriel to come here.

NANCY. What's amiss?

EMILY. I—well—I hardly like——

MONKHURST. Your excellent son Richard has been seen trying to kiss my sister.

NANCY. What was *she* doing?

EMILY. Well, that's not the point.

NANCY. And supposing he *was* trying to kiss Muriel?

EMILY. I must say, Aunt Nancy, you don't seem very surprised.

NANCY. Who *would* be? You invite young people to a golden wedding, and then you're startled when you catch 'em kissing. What else do you expect?

EMILY. I expect a good deal else.

NANCY. Then you're likely to be disappointed. As a matter of fact, I knew Richard was going to kiss Muriel to-night.

EMILY. Who told you?

NANCY. *He* did, of course. At least, he let out to me he was going to propose to her. He usually gets what he wants, you know.

EMILY. [*Angrily surprised.*] H'm!

MONKHURST. [*Very definitely.*] He won't get what he wants this time.

NANCY. Oh?

MONKHURST. You must see that my sister can't marry an engineer.



NANCY. Well—why not an engineer? What are *you*? I can tell you what you might have been, if you hadn't been born in the right bedroom: you might have been a billiard-marker. What have you done? Tell me a single thing you've done!

MONKHURST. I've—— Oh! What tripe!

EMILY. Really, Aunt Nancy——

NANCY. Yes, my son is an engineer. And if you want to know what sort of an engineer he is, go to Mr Arthur Preece.

MONKHURST. [*Disdainfully.*] Who's Preece?

NANCY. [*Imitating his tone.*] Ask your mother who *Preece* is.

EMILY. [*Self-consciously.*] Aunt Nancy!

NANCY. [*Continuing.*] You aren't old enough to remember Mr Preece as an engineer, but, at any rate, you know he's in the House of Commons, whereas you're only in the House of Lords. And I'd like you to tell me where your grandfather'd have been last week with all his workmen on strike—but for Mr Preece!

MONKHURST. Oh, *that* Preece!

NANCY. Exactly. And it's that Preece that thinks the world of my son. My son's been out to Canada, and look how he got on in Winnipeg! And now he's going out again, whose capital is he taking but your grandfather's? I should like to see your grandfather trust *you* with thirty thousand pounds and a ticket to Canada.

MONKHURST. I'm in no need of capital, thank ye.

NANCY. Lucky for you you aren't! My husband left me very badly off, poor man, but I could count on Richard. A pretty look-out for your mother if she'd had to count on you!

EMILY. [*Impatient.*] Really, Aunt Nancy——

NANCY. [*Nettled.*] Well, you leave my son alone.

[*Enter from the hall Muriel and Richard. Muriel is a handsome girl of twenty-four, rather thin and eager, with a high forehead, and much distinction. She has herself under absolute control. Richard is a tall, broad, darkish fellow of twenty-seven, with a clean-shaven heavy face and rough hair. He is very taciturn.*]

EMILY. Muriel, it was you that I asked for.

MURIEL. [*Quite calmly.*] We were both just coming to tell you.

EMILY. Tell me what?

MURIEL. We're engaged.

EMILY. Does Richard leave you to say this to me?

MURIEL. Well, you know he was never a great talker.



RICHARD. There it is—we 're engaged.

NANCY. [*To Muriel.*] How matter-of-fact you are, you girls, nowadays. [*She caresses Richard.*]

MURIEL. Well, nobody seems strikingly enthusiastic here.

EMILY. I should think not. I don't like these underhand ways.

MURIEL. What underhand ways? Surely you didn't expect Richard to announce in advance the exact place and hour he was going to propose to me.

EMILY. Please don't try to imitate your dear father. You 're worse than Gerald sometimes.

MURIEL. Oh, very well, mamma! What else?

EMILY. Do you mean to tell me you 're seriously thinking of going out to Canada—to Winnipeg—for the rest of your days?

MURIEL. Of course, mamma! I 'm sure I shall be happier there than here.

EMILY. You 'll leave England?

MURIEL. Certainly. Politics are much more satisfactory over there, except for woman's suffrage. All the questions that all the silly statesmen are still wrangling about here have been settled over there ages ago.

EMILY. My poor girl!

MURIEL. Mamma, I wish you wouldn't say 'my poor girl.'

EMILY. What have politics to do with happiness?

MURIEL. They have a great deal to do with mine. But, of course, what most attracts me is all those thousands of square miles of wheat fields, and Richard making reaping-machines for them. The day I first see one of Richard's new machines at work on a Canadian wheat farm will be the happiest day of my life—except to-day.

NANCY. [*Amazed at these sentiments.*] Well, you 're a caution!

MONKHURST. [*With disgust.*] Why not marry an agricultural implement while you 're about it?

RICHARD. [*Threateningly.*] You shut up!

MURIEL. But aren't you glad, mamma?

EMILY. I can't discuss the matter now.

MURIEL. But what is there to discuss?

EMILY. [*After a pause.*] Muriel, I tell you at once, both of you, I shan't allow this marriage.

MURIEL. Not allow it? My poor mamma!

MONKHURST. Certainly not.

RICHARD. I 've told you to shut up once.

EMILY. And your grandfather won't allow it, either.

MURIEL. Of course, mamma, you and I have always been

devoted to each other. You've made allowances for me, and I've made allowances for you. But you must please remember that we're in the year 1912. I've promised to marry Richard, and I shall marry him. There's no question of being 'allowed.' And if it comes to that, why shouldn't I marry him, indeed?

EMILY. You—your father's daughter, to think of going out to Winnipeg as the wife of a—— Your place is in London.

RICHARD. [*Stiffening at the sight of trouble.*] But I say, Cousin Emily——

MURIEL. [*Gently, but firmly.*] Richard—please. [*Turning to her mother.*] Mamma, you really do shock me. Just because I'm the Honourable Muriel Pym! [*Laughs.*] I won't say you're a snob, because everybody's a snob, in some way or other. But you don't understand the new spirit, not in the least—and I'm so sorry. Why! Hasn't it occurred to you even yet that the aristocracy racket's played out?

[*Rose and John enter by the double doors. They have both grown very old, Rose being seventy-three and John seventy-seven. Rose has become short-sighted, white-haired, and stoutish. John has grown a little deaf; his hair is thin, his eyes sunken, his complexion of wax, his features sharply defined. Gertrude follows them, now seventy-three. She has grown into a thin, shrivelled old woman, erect, hard, with a high, shrill voice and keen, clear eyes.*]

ROSE. Oh! It's here they seem to be collected. [*To Monkhurst.*] Is that you, Gerald? Wherever has the poor lamb been? [*She kisses him.*]

MONKHURST. Grandma, congratulations. [*To John.*] Congratulations, sir.

JOHN. [*Sternly.*] Is this what you call good manners, boy?

MONKHURST. Sorry, sir. I was kept.

JOHN. [*Sarcastically.*] Kept?

MONKHURST. At the House of Lords. A division.

MURIEL. Good Heavens! Break it to us gently. Has his grandma's lamb gone into politics?

MONKHURST. [*Haughtily ignoring his sister.*] They telephoned me from headquarters. I thought you would prefer me——

JOHN. Certainly, my boy. [*Shakes his hand.*] You couldn't have celebrated our golden wedding in a fashion more agreeable to us than by recording your first vote in the House of Lords. Could he, granny?

ROSE. [*Feebly.*] Bless us! Bless us!

JOHN. What was the division?

MONKHURST. [*Mumbling.*] Er—the Trades Union Bill, sir.  
Third reading.

JOHN. [*Not hearing.*] What did you say?

MONKHURST. [*Louder.*] Trades Union Bill, sir.

MURIEL. Oh, my poor lamb! The Trades Union Bill division isn't to be taken till to-morrow!

MONKHURST. [*Hastily.*] What am I thinking of? It must have been the Extended Franchise Bill, then. . . . Anyhow, I voted.

JOHN. [*Coughing.*] H'm! H'm!

GERTRUDE. [*Drawing a shawl round her shoulders, fretfully.*]  
Couldn't we have that window closed?

ROSE. Auntie Gertrude, how brave you are! I daren't have asked. I declare I'm a martyr to this ventilation in my old age.

GERTRUDE. I dare say I'm very old-fashioned, but when I was young we didn't try to turn a drawing-room into a park.

ROSE. [*To Richard, as he closes the window.*] Thank you, Richard.

JOHN. [*Pettishly.*] Put a match to the fire, boy, and have done with it.

[*Richard goes to the fireplace, kneels down, and lights the fire.*]

GERTRUDE. What's the matter, Emily?

EMILY. [*Who has begun to weep.*] Oh, Auntie Gertrude!

NANCY. [*Soothingly.*] Come, come, Emily.

JOHN. What's that? What's that?

ROSE. [*Peering at Emily.*] What is it, John?

JOHN. Monkhurst, have you been upsetting your mother again?

MURIEL. I think it's *us*, grandpapa.

JOHN. What does she say?

MURIEL. I'm afraid it's *us*—Richard and me. We're engaged to be married.

[*Muriel points to Richard, who is still on his knees busy with the fire.*]

ROSE. Oh, my dear—how sudden! What a shock! What a shock! I can understand your mother crying. I must cry myself. Come and kiss me! It's astonishing how quietly you young people manage these things nowadays.

[*Embraces Muriel.*]

JOHN. Who's engaged to be married? Who's engaged to be married?

RICHARD. [*Loudly, rising and dusting his hands.*] Muriel and I, sir.



JOHN. Mu—Mu——! What the devil do you mean, sir?

Emily, what in God's name are you thinking of?

EMILY. [*Whimpering.*] It's just as much of a surprise to me as to anybody. I don't approve of it.

MONKHURST. I've told them already you would never approve, sir.

NANCY. You haven't, young man. It was your mother who told us that.

JOHN. [*To Nancy.*] I asked you to my golden wedding, Nancy—

NANCY. You did, Sir John. I shouldn't have come without.

JOHN. Do you countenance this—affair?

NANCY. What's wrong with it?

ROSE. [*Timidly.*] Yes, John. What's wrong with it. Why shouldn't my Muriel marry her Richard?

JOHN. What's wrong with it, d' you say? What——!

EMILY. [*Passionately.*] I won't agree to it.

JOHN. [*To Nancy.*] Nothing wrong with it, from your point of view. Nothing! [*Laughing.*] Only I shan't have it. I won't have it.

ROSE. Grandpa, why do you always try to cross me?

JOHN. I? You?

ROSE. I've been yielding to you in everything for fifty years. I think I'm old enough to have my own way now—just once.

JOHN. [*Startled.*] What's come over you?

ROSE. Nothing's come over me. But I really——

JOHN. [*Subduing her.*] Be silent, granny!

NANCY. We thought you thought very highly of Richard.

JOHN. So I do. But what's that got to do with it? It's nothing but this genius business over again.

NANCY. Genius business?

JOHN. Yes. I shall be told Richard's a genius, therefore he must be allowed to marry Muriel. Nonsense! I had just the same difficulty with her mother twenty-six years ago. You ought to remember; you were there! Hadn't I, Emily?

EMILY. [*Faintly.*] Yes.

JOHN. [*Not hearing.*] What's that?

EMILY. Yes, father. Yes.

JOHN. Of course I had. I wouldn't have it then, and I won't have it now. What? Here's a young fellow, a very smart engineer. Insists on going to Canada. Wants capital! Well, I give it him! I tell him he may go. Everything's settled. And then, if you please, he calmly announces his intention of carrying off my granddaughter—him!



ROSE. If she's your granddaughter, he's my nephew.

JOHN. [*Glaring at her.*] Sh!

ROSE. No! I wo——

JOHN. [*Continuing, staring at Rose.*] My granddaughter has got to marry something very different from an engineer.

NANCY. If she did she might marry something that'll turn her hair grey a good deal sooner.

JOHN. I have my plans for Muriel.

EMILY. Imagine Muriel in Winnipeg!

MURIEL. What plans, granddad? You've never told me about any plans.

JOHN. Not told you! At your age, your mother had a conspicuous place in London society. And it's your duty to carry on the family tradition. Your mother didn't marry into the peerage so that you could gallivant up and down Winnipeg as the wife of a manufacturing engineer. You have some notion of politics, though it's a mighty queer one——

MURIEL. I hardly think my politics would further your plan, granddad. I should have supposed the whole of my career would have made it plain that I have the greatest contempt for official politics.

JOHN. Your 'career'! Your 'contempt'! [*Laughs good-humouredly, then more softly.*] My child——

MURIEL. [*Nettled.*] I'm not a child.

JOHN. [*Angrily.*] Enough! Don't make yourself ridiculous. [*More quietly.*] Your mother and your brother think as I do. Let that suffice.

RICHARD. Pardon me, sir, but suppose it won't suffice?

JOHN. [*Furious.*] I—I——

MURIEL. [*Violently.*] Granddad, do please keep calm.

JOHN. [*As above.*] I'm perfectly calm, I believe.

NANCY. [*To Gertrude.*] Then he'd believe anything!

MURIEL. You don't seem to have understood that we're engaged to be married.

GERTRUDE. I must say——

JOHN. And what must *you* say? You'll side with my wife against me and the girl's own mother, I suppose?

GERTRUDE. I fail to see any objection whatever.

JOHN. Do you, indeed! Well, objection or no objection, I mean it to be stopped—now, at once.

MURIEL. But how shall you stop it, granddad?

JOHN. If I hear one more word of this, one more word—there'll be no thirty thousand pounds for Richard. Not from me, at

any rate. And I don't imagine that your mother will help him, or Monkhurst either. Where is he?

MONKHURST. Not much.

MURIEL. But that won't stop it, granddad!

ROSE. [*Rising, and going to the hall door.*] John, you're a hard, hard old man. The one thing I ask of you, and on our golden wedding day, too, and you won't even listen. You shut me up as though I were a—a—— I do think it's a shame. The poor things! [*She goes out in tears.*]

NANCY. [*Hurrying out after her.*] Rose! Rose! Don't!

JOHN. Here I arrange a nice little family dinner to celebrate the occasion. I invite no outsiders, so that we shall be nice and homely and comfortable. And this is how you treat me. You induce your grandmother to defy me—the first time in her life. You bring your mother to tears, and you——

EMILY. There's nothing to be said in favour of it—nothing. The very thought of it——

RICHARD. I'm awfully sorry.

JOHN. No, you aren't, sir. So don't be impudent.

*Webster enters.*

WEBSTER. Mr Arthur Preece, Sir John. I've shown him into the study.

JOHN. Very good. [*Webster goes out.*]

GERTRUDE. Why can't Mr Preece come up here?

JOHN. Because he's come to see me on private business, madam. Private, do I say? It's public enough. Everybody knows that I can't keep my own workmen in order without the help of a Labour M.P. The country's going to the dogs! My own father used to say so, and I never believed him. But it's true. [*He goes to the door.*]

MONKHURST. May I come with you, sir! [*With a superior glance at Muriel.*] These family ructions——

JOHN. Come! [*John goes off, followed by Monkhurst.*]

GERTRUDE. [*Meaningly.*] Richard, go and see where your mother is, will you? [*Richard follows the others. A slight pause.*]

EMILY. [*Still weakly and tearfully.*] How your poor grandmother is upset!

MURIEL. Yes, I'm very sorry.

EMILY. That's something.

MURIEL. It's such a humiliating sight. No real arguments. No attempt to understand *my* point of view! Nothing but blustering and bullying and stamping up and down. He

wants to make out that I'm still a child with no will of my own. But it's he who's the child.

GERTRUDE. Come, come, Muriel.

MURIEL. Yes, it is. A spoilt child! When anything happens that doesn't just please him, there's a fine exhibition of temper. Don't we all know it! And this is the great Sir John Rhead! Bah!

EMILY. [*Amazed.*] Muriel!

MURIEL. Oh, of course it isn't his fault! Every one's always given him his own way—especially grandma. It's positively pathetic; grandma trying to turn against him now. Poor old thing! As if she could! Now!

EMILY. Muriel, your cold-bloodedness absolutely frightens me.

MURIEL. But, mother, I'm not cold-blooded. It's only common sense.

GERTRUDE. [*Clumsily caressing Emily.*] Darling!

EMILY. Common sense will be the finish of me; I've no one left in the world now.

GERTRUDE. [*Hurt.*] Then I suppose I'm too old to count. And yet for nearly fifty years I've lived for nobody but you. Many and many a time I should have been ready to die—yes, glad to—only you were there.

EMILY. [*Affectionately.*] And yet you're against me now.

GERTRUDE. I only want you not to have any regrets.

EMILY. Any regrets! My life has been all regrets. Look at me.

GERTRUDE. Not all your life, dear—your marriage.

[*Muriel looks up.*]

EMILY. [*Firmly, and yet frightened, with a look at Muriel.*] Hush, auntie!

GERTRUDE. Why? Why should I hush? You say your life's been all regrets. If you care about being honest with Muriel, you ought to tell her now that you did not marry the man you were in love with.

EMILY. [*In an outburst.*] Don't believe it, Muriel. No one could have been a kinder husband than your father was, and I always loved him.

MURIEL. [*Intimidated by these revelations of feeling.*] Mother!

GERTRUDE. Then what do you regret? You had an affection for Ned, but if you had loved him as you loved—the other one—what is there to regret? And now you seem to be doing your best to make regrets for Muriel—and—and—oh, Emily, why do you do it?

MURIEL. [*Moved, but controlling herself.*] Yes, mamma! Why?



I'm sure I'm open to hear reason on any subject—even marriage.

EMILY. [*Blackly.*] Reason! Reason! There you are again! My child, you're my eldest, and I've loved you beyond everybody. You've never been attached to me. It isn't your fault, and I don't blame you. Things happen to be like that, that's all. You don't know how hard you are. If you did, you'd be ready to bite your tongue off. Here I am, with you and Gerald. Gerald is not bad at heart, but he's selfish and he's a fool. I could never talk freely to him as I do to you. One day he'll be asking me to leave Berkeley Square, and I shall go and finish my days in the country. And here you calmly announce you're off to Canada, and you want my *reasons* for objecting! There's only one reason—all the others are nothing—mere excuses—and you couldn't guess that one reason. You have to be told. If you cared for me, you wouldn't force me to the shame of telling you.

MURIEL. [*Whispering.*] Shame?

EMILY. Isn't it humiliating for a mother to have to tell her daughter, who never's even thought of it, that she cannot bear to lose her—cannot bear?—Canada!

MURIEL. [*Throwing herself at her mother's knees.*] Mother, I'll never leave you! [*She sobs, burying her face in her mother's lap.*

GERTRUDE. [*Softly.*] All this self-sacrifice is a sad mistake. [*To Muriel.*] None of us can live for ever. When your mother is gone—what will you do then?

MURIEL. [*Climbing up and kissing her mother.*] I'll never leave you!

EMILY. My child!

GERTRUDE. [*Gently.*] It's wrong of you, Emily! All wrong!

[*Arthur Preece enters from the hall. His hair and moustache have grown grey. His expression and manner are slightly disillusioned and cynical. In figure he is the same.*

PREECE. Good evening.

MURIEL. [*On seeing him, rises quickly rather like a schoolgirl.*] Good evening.

[*She goes out rapidly. Preece looks after her a little surprised.*

EMILY. [*At once the woman of the world.*] Good evening. You've soon finished your business with father.

PREECE. [*Puzzled by the appearance of things.*] Good evening. [*He shakes hands with Emily.*] What is the matter? The old gentleman really wasn't equal to seeing me. I just told him



what I had to tell him about the strikers, and then he said I'd perhaps better come up here. I think he wanted to be alone.

EMILY. Poor dear!

PREECE. Nothing serious, I hope?

GERTRUDE. [*Briskly, shaking Preece by the hand.*] The usual thing, Mr Preece, the usual thing! A new generation has got to the marrying age. You know what it is. I know what it is. Now, Emily, don't begin to cry again. People who behave as selfishly as you're doing have no right to weep—except for their sins.

EMILY. [*Protesting.*] Auntie, this can't possibly interest Mr Preece.

GERTRUDE. [*Still more briskly.*] Don't talk that kind of conventional nonsense, Emily! You know quite well it *will* interest Mr Preece extremely. [*Rising.*] Now just tell him all about it and see what he says. [*With a peculiar tone.*] I suppose you'll admit he ought to be a good judge of such matters?

[*She moves to the door.*]

EMILY. Where are you going?

GERTRUDE. [*Imitating Emily slightly.*] That can't possibly interest you. [*Wearily.*] I'm out of patience.

[*She goes out of the room.*]

EMILY. [*Trying to force a light tone.*] I hope you had some good news about the workmen for my poor old father. What a finish for his golden wedding day!

PREECE. [*Following her lead.*] Yes, I think his little affair's pretty well fixed up—anyhow for the present. He's shown himself pretty reasonable. If he'd continued to be as obstinate as he was at the start, the thing would have run him into a lot of money.

EMILY. I wonder he doesn't retire.

PREECE. He's going to. There's to be a Limited Company.

EMILY. Father—a Limited Company! He told you?

PREECE. Yes.

EMILY. Then he must have been feeling it's getting too much for him.

PREECE. Well, considering his years—seventy-seven, isn't it? Some of us will be beaten long before that age. [*He sighs.*]

EMILY. Why that sigh? *You* aren't getting ready to give up, are you?

PREECE. No, I expect I shall go on till I drop.

EMILY. I should have thought you had every reason to be satisfied with what you have done.

PREECE. Why?

EMILY. Unless you regret giving up steel for politics.

PREECE. No. I don't regret that. I'd done all I really wanted to do there. I'd forced your father to take up steel on a big scale. I'd made more than all the money I needed. And other processes were coming along, better than mine.

EMILY. I wonder how many men there are who've succeeded as you have done, both in politics and out of politics.

PREECE. Do you think I've succeeded in politics?

EMILY. You haven't held office, but I've always understood it was because you preferred to be independent.

PREECE. It was. I could have sold my soul over and over again for a seat at an Under-Secretary's desk. I wouldn't even lead the Labour Party.

EMILY. But every one knows you're the strongest man in the Labour Party.

PREECE. Well, if I am—the strongest man in the Labour Party is rather depressed.

EMILY. Why?

PREECE. Difficult to say. Twenty years ago, I thought the millennium would be just about established in 1912. Instead of that, it's as far off as ever. It's even further off.

EMILY. Further off?

PREECE. Yes. And yet a lot of us have worked. By God, we have! But there's a different spirit now. The men are bitter. They can't lead themselves and they won't be led. They won't be led. And nobody knows what's going to happen next. Except that trouble's going to happen. I often wonder why I was cursed with the reforming spirit. How much happier I should have been if I'd cared for nothing in this world but my own work—like young Richard Sibley, for instance.

EMILY. Isn't he interested in reform?

PREECE. Not he! He's an engineer, only an engineer. He minds his own business. I suppose he's here to-night.

EMILY. Yes.

PREECE. [*In an ordinary tone.*] Why won't you let him marry Miss Muriel?

EMILY. [*Startled.*] Then father's told you?

PREECE. Not a word. But Richard and I are great pals. He's told me his plans. Why shouldn't they marry?

EMILY. [*Weakly.*] Muriel won't go to Canada.

PREECE. Won't go to Canada? But I understand she had a tremendous notion of Canada.

EMILY. She's promised me she won't go.

PREECE. But why should she do that?

EMILY. [*Half breaking down.*] Oh, I know I'm selfish. But—but—I should be quite alone, if she went. And then, it's not what we'd anticipated for her. We naturally hoped——

PREECE. Oh! Of course, if you're in the marriage market——

EMILY. No. Really it's not that—at least as far as I'm concerned. I should be so utterly alone. And she's promised me. If she deserted me——

PREECE. Deserted—rather a strong word——

EMILY. Please don't be hard! You don't know how unhappy I am. You admit you're discouraged.

PREECE. I said 'depressed.'

EMILY. Well, depressed, then. Can't you feel for others?

PREECE. [*Rather roughly.*] And who made me admit it? Who kept questioning me and worming it out of me? You wouldn't leave it alone. You're like all the other women—and I've had to do with a few.

EMILY. [*Affronted.*] Please——

PREECE. It isn't sufficient for you to make a man unhappy. You aren't satisfied till he admits you've made him unhappy.

EMILY. [*Protesting.*] Oh!

PREECE. How many times have I seen you since this cursed strike brought me among the family again? Half a dozen, perhaps. And every single time I've noticed you feeling your way towards it. And to-night you've just got there.

EMILY. Arthur, you must forgive me. It's quite true. We can't help it.

PREECE. What should I care about lost millenniums and labour troubles ahead, if I'd any genuine personal interest of my own? Not a jot! Not a tinker's curse! Do you remember you let me kiss you—once?

EMILY. Forgive me! I know I oughtn't to be forgiven. But life's so difficult. Ever since I've been seeing you again I've realized how miserable I am—it's such a long time since. It seems as it was some other girl and not me—twenty-six years ago—here! And yet it's like yesterday.

[*She sobs. Preece embraces her first roughly and then very tenderly.*]

PREECE. My child!



EMILY. I 'm an old woman.

PREECE. You said it was like yesterday—when you were twenty-three—so it is. *[They kiss again.]*

EMILY. *[With a little laugh.]* This will kill father.

PREECE. Not it. Your father has a remarkable constitution. It 's much more likely to kill the Labour Party.

*John enters, agitated and weary.*

JOHN. *[Brusquely.]* Where 's your mother? She 's not in the other room. I thought she was in here. I want to see her.

EMILY. She 's probably gone to her own room—poor dear!

JOHN. Can't you go and find her? *[He sits down, discouraged.]*

EMILY. *[Coming over to him.]* Father, I 've been thinking it over, and I 'm afraid we shall have to agree to Muriel's marriage.

JOHN. We shall have to agree to it? I shan't agree to it.

EMILY. As Mr Preece says——

JOHN. Mr Preece?

EMILY. You know how friendly he is with Richard—as Mr Preece says, why shouldn't they marry?

PREECE. I merely ventured to put the question, Sir John.

JOHN. Why shouldn't they? Because they shouldn't. Isn't that enough? *[To Emily.]* A quarter of an hour ago you yourself agreed in the most positive way that there was nothing whatever to be said in favour of such a match.

EMILY. I was rather overlooking the fact that they 're in love with each other—*[glancing at Preece]*—a quarter of an hour ago.

JOHN. Are all you women gone mad to-night? Preece, do you reckon *you* understand women?

PREECE. Now and then one gets a glimpse, sir.

JOHN. *[Realizing state of affairs between Preece and Emily.]* H'm!

EMILY. *[Noticing her father watch her, rather self-consciously.]* After all, what difference can it make to us? We shan't be here as long as they will.

JOHN. What? What?

EMILY. *[Louder.]* We shan't be here as long as they will, I say.

JOHN. That 's it! Tell me I 'm an old man! Of course, it can't make any difference to us. I was looking at the matter solely from their point of view. How can it affect me—*whom* Muriel marries?

EMILY. Well, then! Let them judge for themselves. You agree? [*John stares before him obstinately.*] Father—— [*John shakes his head impatiently.*] Dad!

JOHN. [*Looking up like a sulky child.*] Oh, have it your own way. I'm not the girl's mother. If you've made up your mind, there's nothing more to be said.

EMILY. And Richard's capital?

JOHN. Oh, it's all lying ready. [*Shrugs his shoulders.*] May as well have it, I suppose.

EMILY. You're a dear!

JOHN. I'm not a dear, and I hate to be called a dear.

EMILY. What a shocking untruth! I shall go and tell them, I think. [*She goes to the door.*]

JOHN. [*Calling her back.*] Emily!

EMILY. Yes.

JOHN. Don't let them come in here. I couldn't bear it.

EMILY. Oh, but——

JOHN. I couldn't stand the strain of another scene. It's late now—I'm an old man, and people have no right to upset me in this way.

EMILY. Couldn't they just say good night?

JOHN. Very well. They must just say good night and go at once. Another day——

EMILY. [*Very soothingly.*] I'll tell them you're very tired. [*She nods smilingly at her father and leaves the room. A slight pause.*]

PREECE. A difficult job, being the head of a family.

JOHN. I've done with it, Preece. I've decided that to-night—that's what a golden wedding comes to in these days. Things aren't what they were. In my time a man was at any rate master in his own house and on his own works. Seemed natural enough! But you've changed all that.

PREECE. I've changed it?

JOHN. [*Continuing confidentially.*] Why, even my own wife's gone against me to-night. My own wife! [*Troubled.*] Did you ever hear of such a thing?

PREECE. I have heard of it, Sir John.

JOHN. [*Grimly.*] You laugh. Wait till you're married.

PREECE. I may have to wait a long time.

JOHN. Eh, what? A long time? Don't try to hoodwink me, Preece. I know what you all say when I'm not there. 'Old Rhead.' 'Be breaking up soon, the old man!' But I'm not

yet quite doddering. [*Pointedly.*] You'll be married inside six months—and every newspaper in London will be full of it. Yes, answer that. My workmen go out on strike, and you poke your nose in and arrange it for me. Then my family go on strike, and upon my soul, you poke your damned nose in there, too, and arrange that for me—on your own terms. Tut-tut! Shake hands, man! You and your like are running the world to the devil, and I'm too old to step in and knock you down. But—but—I wish you luck, my lad. You're a good sort. [*They shake hands.*]

*Emily, Nancy, Muriel, Richard, and Gertrude all enter from the hall.*

PREECE. Well, good night, Sir John.

EMILY. [*Cheerfully.*] We're just coming to say good night, grandpapa. I'm sure you must be very tired. We've said good night to granny.

JOHN. [*Feebly.*] Where is she? Where is granny?

NANCY. [*Heartily, shaking hands.*] Good night, John, and thank you for a very pleasant time.

*[She goes to Gertrude, who now stands near the door, and kisses her good night.]*

RICHARD. [*Heartily shaking hands.*] Thank you, sir.

*[Nancy passes out by the door. Gertrude now shakes hands with Richard, who follows his mother.]*

EMILY. [*Kisses John.*] Good night, dear.

*[John, turning from Emily, moves with a generous gesture to Muriel, who, however, keeps a very stiff demeanour and shakes hands in cold silence. Emily has reached Gertrude. They both watch Muriel.]*

EMILY. [*With a shade of disappointment turns to Gertrude.*] Good night, auntie.

*[Gertrude and Emily embrace, then Emily passes quickly out of the door.]*

JOHN. [*Stiffly, looking about.*] Where's Monkhurst?

GERTRUDE. Oh, he is gone! He said he had an appointment at his club.

JOHN. What club? The Carlton?

MURIEL. [*Shaking hands with Gertrude.*] The Automobile, you may depend. [*She goes off by the door quickly.*]

GERTRUDE. Well, this day is over.



*Webster enters from the hall.*

WEBSTER. Any orders, Sir John?

JOHN. None.

GERTRUDE. Can't we have some of the blaze of electricity turned off?

JOHN. As you like.

*[Webster extinguishes several clusters with the switches at the door, then goes out. The room is left in a discreet light.]*

JOHN. *[Almost plaintively.]* Where's Rose?

*Rose enters timidly from the hall.*

GERTRUDE. Here she is.

ROSE. *[Going up to John.]* John, forgive me for having dared to differ from my dear husband.

JOHN. *[Taking her hand softly.]* Old girl—*[then half humorously shaking his head]*—you'll be the death of me, if you do it again.

GERTRUDE. I think I'm going to bed.

JOHN. No, not yet.

ROSE. Gertrude, will you do me a favour, on my golden wedding day?

GERTRUDE. What is it?

ROSE. Sing for us.

GERTRUDE. Oh! My singing days are over long ago.

JOHN. *[Persuasively.]* Go on—go on. There's nobody but us to hear.

GERTRUDE. Really it is——*[Stops.]* Very well.

*[Gertrude goes through the double doors. Rose draws her lace shawl round her.]*

JOHN. Let's sit by the fire if you're cold.

*[He moves a chair in place for her gallantly. Rose sits to the right of the fire. The song 'Juanita' is heard in a cracked and ancient voice, very gently and faintly.]*

ROSE. *[Softly, by the fire.]* When I think of all this room has seen——

JOHN. *[Looking into the fire.]* Ah!

ROSE. I'm sure it's very pleasant to remember.

JOHN. Ah! That's because you're pleasant. I've said it before, and I say it again. The women of to-day aren't what women used to be. They're hard. They've none of the old charm. Unsexed—that's what they are—unsexed.

*[Muriel enters quickly from the hall in a rich white cloak. She pauses, smiling, then hurries delicately across to her grandfather and embraces him; releases him, shyly takes a flower from her bosom, drops it into his hand, turns and gives her grandmother a smile, whispering 'Good night. They're waiting for me,' and hurries out again.]*

JOHN. *[Looking at the flower.]* We live and learn.

ROSE. *[Nodding her head.]* Yes, John. *[The song continues.]*

CURTAIN

*Vivaldi Ganga*

# THE DOVER ROAD

A. A. MILNE



## CHARACTERS

### THE HOUSE

DOMINIC      THE STAFF      MR LATIMER

### THE GUESTS

LEONARD      ANNE      EUSTASIA      NICHOLAS

*The scene is the reception-room of Mr Latimer's house, a little way  
off the Dover Road*

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The first performance of this play in London took place at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, on 7th June 1922, with the following cast:

DOMINIC	.	.	Allan Aynesworth
MR LATIMER	.	.	Henry Ainley
LEONARD	.	.	Nicholas Hannen
ANNE	.	.	Nancy Atkin
EUSTASIA	.	.	Athene Seyler
NICHOLAS	.	.	John Deverell

## ACT I

*What Mr Latimer prefers to call the reception-room of his house is really the hall. You come straight into it through the heavy oak front door. But this door is so well built, so well protected by a thick purple curtain, and the room so well warmed by central heating, that none of the usual disadvantages of a hall on a November night attaches to it. Just now, of course, all the curtains are drawn, so that the whole of this side of the hall is purple-hung. In the middle of the room, a little to the right, is a mahogany table, clothless, laid for three. A beautiful blue bowl, filled with purple anemones, helps, with the silver and the old cut glass, to decorate it. Over the whole room there is something of an Arabian-night-adventure air. In the daytime, perhaps, it is an ordinary hall, furnished a trifle freakishly, but in the night time one wonders what is going to happen next.*

*Dominic, tall, stout, and grave, the major-domo of the house, in a butler's old-fashioned evening dress, comes in. He stands looking at the room to see that all is as it should be, then walks to the table and gives a little touch to it here and there. He turns round and waits a moment. The Staff materializes suddenly—two footmen and two chambermaids. The men come from the left, the women from the right; over their clothes, too, Mr Latimer has been a little freakish. They stand in a line.*

DOMINIC. The blue room in the east wing is ready?

THE MEN. Yes, Mr Dominic.

DOMINIC. The white room in the west wing is ready?

THE WOMEN. Yes, Mr Dominic.

DOMINIC. The procedure will be as before.

THE FOUR. Yes, Mr Dominic.

DOMINIC. See to it that I have no fault to find. That will do.

*[They go out. He looks at his watch and then follows the men. He is hardly out of the room when a bell rings. He returns slowly, draws the curtain from the front door, and opens it. Leonard, in fur coat and cap, is seen standing outside. He is a big, well-made man of about thirty-five—dark, with a little black tooth-brush moustache. When*

*the door opens he gets his first sight of the interior of the room, and is evidently taken by surprise.*

LEONARD. Oh—er—is this—er—an hotel? My chauffeur said—we've had an accident, been delayed on the way—he said that we could put up here. [*He turns round and calls.*] Here, Saunders! This can't be the place. [*To Dominic.*] Perhaps you could tell me——

ANNE. [*From outside, invisible.*] Saunders has gone, Leonard.

LEONARD. [*Turning round.*] Gone! What the devil——

*[He plunges into the darkness.]*

DOMINIC. Saunders was perfectly correct, my lord. This is a sort of hotel.

ANNE. [*Getting out of the car, but still invisible.*] He went off as soon as you got out of the car. Leonard, are you sure——?

*[She comes into the light; he is holding her arm. Pretty she is, to the first sight; but what holds you is the mystery of her youthfulness; her aloof, untouched innocence; her grave coolness; her—well, we shall let her speak for herself. Just at present she is a little upset by the happenings of the night.]*

DOMINIC. Saunders was perfectly correct, my lord. This is a sort of hotel.

LEONARD. [*Puzzled.*] What the devil's happened to him?

*[He looks out into the darkness.]*

DOMINIC. Doubtless he has gone round to the garage to get the doors open. Won't your lordship——?

LEONARD. You can put us up? Just for to-night. My—er—wife and myself——

DOMINIC. If your lordship and her ladyship will come in——  
*[He waits for them.]*

LEONARD. [*To Anne.*] It's the best we can do, dear. I'm frightfully sorry about it, but, after all, what difference——

ANNE. [*Giving him a look which means 'Don't talk like this in front of hotel servants.'*] I dare say it will be quite comfortable. It's only for one night. *[She comes in, followed by Leonard.]*

DOMINIC. Thank you, my lady.

*[He shuts and bolts the doors, then draws the curtains. There is an air of finality about it. Anne looks back at the noise of the bolts going home with something of a start. They are locked in now for good. Leonard, his eye on the supper-table, is saying to himself, 'Dashed rummy sort of hotel.']*



DOMINIC. Allow me, my lady.

*[He helps them off with their coats.]*

LEONARD. You can give us something to eat?

ANNE. I don't want anything, Leonard.

LEONARD. Nonsense, dear.

DOMINIC. Supper will be served in five minutes, my lord.

ANNE. *[Suddenly.]* Do you know who we are?

DOMINIC. I have not that pleasure, my lady.

ANNE. Then why do you call me 'my lady'?

LEONARD. *[Disliking a scene.]* My dear!

ANNE. *[Waving back Leonard's protesting arm.]* No, Leonard.

*[To Dominic.]* Well?

DOMINIC. His lordship mentioned that your ladyship was his wife.

ANNE. Y—yes. . . . Then you know *him* by sight?

LEONARD. *[Complacently.]* Well, my dear, that need not surprise you.

DOMINIC. I know his lordship's rank, my lady. Not his lordship's name.

LEONARD. *[Surprised.]* My rank? How the devil——

DOMINIC. Supper will be served in five minutes, my lady.

*[He bows and goes out. There is silence for a little. They look at the table, at the room, at each other. Then Leonard says it aloud.]*

LEONARD. Dashed rummy sort of hotel!

ANNE. *[Coming closer and holding his arm.]* Leonard. I don't like it.

LEONARD. Pooh! Nonsense, dear.

ANNE. It almost seems as though they had expected us.

LEONARD. *[Laughing.]* My dear child, how could they? In the ordinary way we should have been at Dover—why, almost at Calais by this time.

ANNE. I know. *[In distress.]* Why aren't we?

LEONARD. The car—Saunders, a fool of a chauffeur—a series of unfortunate accidents——

ANNE. Do you often have these unfortunate accidents, Leonard?

LEONARD. My dear Anne, you aren't suggesting that I've done this on purpose!

ANNE. No, no. *[She leaves him, and goes and sits down.]* But why to-night of all nights?

LEONARD. Of course, it's damned annoying missing the boat, but we can get it to-morrow morning. We shall be in Paris to-morrow night.

ANNE. To-morrow night—but that makes such a difference. I hate every hour we spend together like this in England.

LEONARD. Well, really, I don't see why——

ANNE. You must take it that I do, Leonard. I told you from the first that it was *run-away* or nothing with me; there was going to be no *intrigue*, no lies and pretences and evasions. And somehow it seems less—less sordid, if we begin our new life together in a new country. [*With a little smile.*] Perhaps the French for what we are doing is not quite so crude as the English. . . . Yes, I know it 's absurd of me, but there it is.

LEONARD. [*With a shrug.*] Oh, well! [*Taking out his case.*] Do you mind a cigarette?

ANNE. [*Violently.*] Oh, why do men *always* want to smoke, even up to the moment when they 're going to eat? Can't you breathe naturally for five minutes?

LEONARD. [*Sulkily, putting his case back.*] I beg your pardon.

ANNE. No, I beg yours.

LEONARD. You 're all to bits.

ANNE. Nerves, I suppose.

LEONARD. Nonsense! My Anne with nerves? [*Bitterly.*] Now if it had been Eustasia——

ANNE. [*Coldly.*] Really, Leonard, I think we had better leave your wife out of the conversation.

LEONARD. I beg your pardon.

ANNE. [*To herself.*] Perhaps you 're right. In a crisis we are all alike, we women.

LEONARD. [*Going over to her.*] No, damn it, I won't have that. It 's—it 's blasphemy. Anne, my darling——

[*She stands up and he takes her hands.*]

ANNE. Oh! . . . I *am* different, aren't I?

LEONARD. Darling!

ANNE. I 'm not a bit like—like anybody else, am I, not even when I 'm cross?

LEONARD. Darling!

ANNE. And you do love me?

LEONARD. Darling! [*He wants to kiss her, but she stops him.*]

ANNE. No. Now you 're going to smoke. [*She settles him in his chair, takes a cigarette from his case, and puts it in his mouth.*]

I 'll light it for you. Matches?

[*She holds out her hand for them.*]

DOMINIC. [*Who has a way of being there when wanted.*] Matches, my lady. [*He hands them to her. They are both rather confused.*]

ANNE. Thank you.

LEONARD. [*Annoyed.*] Thanks. [*He gets up, takes the matches from Anne, and lights his cigarette. Dominic gives a professional touch to the table and goes out.*] Damn that fellow!

ANNE. [*Smiling.*] After all, darling, he thinks I'm your wife. . . . Or don't wives light their husband's cigarettes?

LEONARD. I believe you're right, Anne. There's something odd about this place.

ANNE. So *you* feel it now?

LEONARD. What did he mean by saying he knew my rank, but not my name?

ANNE. [*Lightly.*] Perhaps he looked inside your cap—like Sherlock Holmes—and saw the embroidered coronet.

LEONARD. How do you mean? There's nothing inside my cap.

ANNE. No, darling. That was a joke. [*He nods tolerantly.*]

LEONARD. And the table laid. Only one table.

ANNE. Yes, but it's for three. They didn't expect *us*.

LEONARD. [*Relieved.*] So it is. . . . It's probably a new idea in hotels—some new stunt of Harrods—or what's the fellow's name?—Lyons. A country-house hotel. By the way, what will you drink?

DOMINIC. [*There as usual.*] Bollinger 1906, my lord. [*He has startled them again.*] Mr Latimer will be down in two minutes, my lady. He asks you to forgive him for not being here to receive you.

LEONARD. Mr Latimer? Who on earth's Mr Latimer?

DOMINIC. If you would wish to be shown your room, my lady——

ANNE. [*Who has not taken her eyes off him.*] No, thank you.

LEONARD. [*Stepping forward.*] Look here, my man, is this an hotel or have we come to a private house by mistake?

DOMINIC. A sort of hotel, my lord. I assure your lordship there is no mistake. Thank you, my lady. [*He goes out.*]

ANNE. [*Laughing half-hysterically as she sits down.*] Very original man, Harrod. Or is it Lyons?

LEONARD. Look here, I'm going to get to the bottom of this.

[*He starts after Dominic.*]

ANNE. Why bother? Mr Latimer will be here in two minutes.

LEONARD. [*Turning back.*] Yes, but who the devil's Mr Latimer?

ANNE. [*With interest.*] Leonard, do you always arrange something fascinating like this when you elope? I think it's so romantic of you. But don't you think that the mere running away is enough just at first? Leaving the fogs and the frets of England, the weariness and the coldness of it, and escaping



together to the warm, blue, sun-filled South—isn't that romantic enough? Why drag in a mysterious and impossible inn, a mysterious and impossible Mr Latimer? You should have kept them for afterwards; for the time when the poetry was wearing out, and we were beginning to get used to each other.

LEONARD. My dear girl, what *are* you driving at? I say again—do you really think that I *arranged* all this?

ANNE. Well, somebody did.

*[The two Footmen and the two Chambermaids come in and take up positions on each side of the table. They are followed by Dominic.]*

DOMINIC. Mr Latimer!

*[Mr Latimer comes in, looks at the visitors, goes off absent-mindedly with Dominic and his Staff, and then comes apologetically back again.]*

LATIMER. Good evening!

*[He bows with an air; an airy gentleman, neither young nor old, dressed rather fantastically as regards his tie and his dinner-jacket and the flower in his button-hole, and enjoying impishly every word of it.]*

LEONARD. Good evening. Er——

LATIMER. *[Confidentially.]* You will forgive me for being announced in my own house, but I find that it saves so much trouble. If I had just come in and said, 'I am Mr Latimer,' then *you* would have had to say, 'And I am—er—So-and-so, and this is—er——' Exactly. I mean we can get on so much better without names. But of course——

LEONARD. You will excuse me, sir, but——

LATIMER. *[Going happily on.]* But of course, as you were just going to say, we must call each other *something*. *[Thoughtfully.]* I think I shall call you Leonard. There is something about you—forgive the liberty—something Leonardish. *[With a very sweet smile to Anne.]* I am sure you agree with me.

ANNE. I am wondering whether this is really happening, or whether I am dreaming it.

LATIMER. *[His back to Leonard.]* And Leonard isn't wondering at all; he is just tapping his forehead with a great deal of expression.

*[Leonard, who was doing this, stops in some confusion.]*

LEONARD. *[Coldly.]* I think we have had enough of this, Mr Latimer. I was giving you the benefit of the doubt. If you

are not mad, then I will ask you for some other explanation of all this nonsense.

LATIMER. [*Sniffing at the flower in his button-hole.*] An impetuous character, Leonard. It must be so obvious to everybody else in the room that an explanation will be forthcoming. But why not a friendly explanation following a friendly supper?

ANNE. Are we your guests?

LATIMER. Please.

ANNE. Thank you.

LATIMER. But there is still this question of names. Now we agreed about Leonard——

ANNE. [*Looking at him fearlessly.*] My name is Anne.

LATIMER. Thank you, Miss Anne.

LEONARD. [*Awkwardly.*] Er—my wife.

LATIMER. Then I am tempted to leave out the 'Miss.'

LEONARD. [*Annoyed again.*] Look here——

LATIMER. [*Turning to him.*] But there is nothing to look at if I do, Leonard. [*The Staff comes in.*] Ah, supper! Will you sit here, Anne? [*He goes to the head of the table, and indicates the chair on the right of him.*] And you here, Leonard? [*The chair on the left.*] That's right. [*They all sit down.*

[*Dominic and the Staff serve the supper. Five of them, so things go quickly.*

LATIMER. 'A little fish, a bird, a little sweet. Enough to drink, but not too much to eat.' I composed that in my bath this morning. The wine has been waiting for you since 1906. How different from the turbot! 'Twas but yesterday it scarce had heard the name of Le-o-nard. [*They are all served with fish, and the wine has been poured out.*] Dominic, dismiss the Staff. We would be alone. [*They are alone. He rises, glass in hand.*] My friends, I will give you a toast. [*He raises his glass.*] A Happy Ending!

ANNE. [*Lifting her glass.*] A Happy Ending!

LATIMER. You don't drink, Leonard. You would have the adventure end unhappily, as is the way of the modern novel?

LEONARD. I don't understand the beginning of it, Mr Latimer. I don't—you will forgive me for saying so—I don't see how you came into it. Who are you?

ANNE. Our host, Leonard.

LEONARD. So it seems, my dear. But in that case, how did we come here? My chauffeur told us that this was an hotel—your man assured me, when I asked, that it was an hotel, a sort of hotel. And now it seems that we are in a private

house. Moreover, we seem to have been expected. And then again—if you will forgive me—it appears to be an unusual kind of house. I tell you frankly that I don't understand it.

LATIMER. I see your difficulty, Leonard.

LEONARD. [*Stiffly.*] Nor am I accustomed to being called Leonard by a perfect stranger.

LATIMER. What you are saying for yourself is: 'Who is this man Latimer? Is he *known*? Is he in the Stud Book?—I mean Debrett. Is he perhaps one of the Hammersmith Latimers, or does he belong to the Ealing Branch?'

ANNE. [*Calmly eating.*] What does it matter?

LATIMER. Yes, but then *you* like the fish. Leonard doesn't.

LEONARD. I have no fault to find with the fish. You have an excellent cook.

LATIMER. [*Gravely bowing.*] I beg your pardon, I thank you.

[*Dominic comes in.*] His lordship likes the fish.

DOMINIC. Thank you, sir. I will inform the cook. [*He goes out.*]

ANNE. When you are giving us your tiresome explanations after supper, Mr Latimer, I wish you would just add one more to them.

LATIMER. But of course!

ANNE. Your Mr Dominic's appearances are so apt. How is it done?

LATIMER. [*Pulling down his cuff.*] Yes, I'll make a note of that.

[*He writes on it.*] Dominic—Apt appearance of.

*Dominic reappears.*

LATIMER. Admit the bird, Dominic. [*Dominic goes out.*]

LEONARD. [*Rising stiffly.*] I'm afraid we shall have to be getting on now, Mr Latimer. . . . Anne, dear. . . . We are much obliged for your hospitality, but—er—I imagine we are not far from Dover—

LATIMER. On the Dover Road, certainly.

LEONARD. Exactly. So if you would—er—have instructions given to my chauffeur—er—

[*He hesitates as the Staff comes in.*]

LATIMER. Dominic, his lordship's glass is empty. He wishes to drink my health.

DOMINIC. I beg your pardon, my lord. [*The glass is filled.*]

LATIMER. And while he is up, just find his lordship a more comfortable chair. He has been a little uneasy on that one all through the fish.



DOMINIC. I beg your pardon, my lord. [*The chair is changed.*]

LATIMER. [*Rising with his glass and drinking to Leonard.*] Your happiness! [*He sits down, and Leonard mechanically sits down too.*] Now for the bird. [*To Anne.*] I like these little ceremonies in between the courses. Don't you?

ANNE. I'm liking my supper.

LATIMER. I am so glad. [*As Anne is helped.*] I shot this bird myself. [*He looks at it through his glass.*] What is it, Dominic?

DOMINIC. *Poulet en casserole* with mushrooms, sir.

LATIMER. *Poulet en casserole* with mushrooms. I shot the mushrooms. . . . A large help for his lordship, Dominic. [*To Leonard.*] Let me introduce your chicken to you, Leonard. One of the Buff-Orpingtons. I dare say you know the family, His mother was a Wyandotte. He was just about to contract an alliance with one of the Rock girls, the Plymouth Rocks, when the accident happened.

[*They are alone again now, plates and glasses well filled. Leonard, who has been waiting impatiently for the Staff to go, pushes back his chair and gets up.*]

LATIMER. Dear me! Not a third chair, surely?

LEONARD. Now look here, Mr Latimer, this farce has gone on long enough. I do not propose to sit through a whole meal without some further explanation. Either we have that explanation now, or else—Anne, dear—or else we'll be getting on our way.

LATIMER. [*Thoughtfully.*] Ah, but which is your way?

LEONARD. Dover. My chauffeur seems to have got off the track a little, but if you can put us on to the Dover Road——

LATIMER. [*To himself.*] The Dover Road! The Dover Road! A dangerous road, my friends. And you're travelling in the dark.

LEONARD. Really, Mr Latimer, that needn't frighten us.

ANNE. [*Putting her hand on his arm.*] What do you mean?

LATIMER. A strange road, Anne, for *you*. A new, untravelled road.

LEONARD. Nonsense. She's often been this way before. Haven't you, dear?

ANNE. [*Shaking her head.*] No. . . . But I'm not frightened, Mr Latimer.

[*There is silence for a little. Then Dominic appears noiselessly.*]

LATIMER. Dominic, supper is over. His lordship loved the chicken—too well to eat it. He adored the mushrooms—in silence. Inform the cook.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

LATIMER. [*Offering his case to Anne.*] A cigarette?

ANNE. No, thank you.

LATIMER. You permit it?

ANNE. Of course.

LATIMER. Thank you.

DOMINIC. [*To Leonard.*] Cigar, my lord?

LEONARD. Er—er—[*but they are good ones*—thanks.

LATIMER. Well, shall we——?

[*They get up, and move into more comfortable chairs, Latimer talking.*

LATIMER. Which chair would you like, Anne? There? [*She sits down.*] That's right. Now then, Leonard, we want something especially comfortable for you. You are a little finicky about chairs, if you don't mind my saying so. . . . What about *that* one? Just try it and see how you like it. [*Leonard tries it, and sinks into it up to the neck.*] Yes, I think you will be happy there. And I shall sit here. Now everything is ready. [*They are alone again.*

LEONARD. [*With as much dignity as is possible from that sort of chair.*] I am waiting, Mr Latimer.

LATIMER. I am waiting, Leonard, for your questions.

ANNE. Let me begin with one. [*He turns to her.*] Your table was laid for three. For whom were the other two places intended?

LATIMER. For yourself and Leonard.

ANNE. You expected us?

LATIMER. Yes.

ANNE. How did you know we were coming?

LATIMER. Saunders had his instructions to bring you.

LEONARD. [*Starting up from his chair—or trying to.*] Saunders! My chauffeur! Do you mean to say——

LATIMER. Let me help you up, Leonard. You have the wrong chair again. It is difficult to be properly indignant in that one. [*He helps him into a sitting position.*] That's better. You were saying——

LEONARD. You mean to tell me that you had the audacity to bribe my chauffeur?

LATIMER. No, no, Leonard. What I mean is that *you* had the foolhardiness to bribe my friend Saunders to be your chauffeur.

LEONARD. Upon my word——

ANNE. Who is Saunders?

LATIMER. Saunders? He's Joseph's brother. Joseph was the gentleman in orange. He helped you to fish.

LEONARD. [*Out of the chair at last.*] How dare you interfere in my concerns in this way, sir!

ANNE. Before you explain how you dare, Mr Latimer, I should like to know *why* you are so interested in us. Who are you?

LATIMER. No more than Mr Latimer. It is a purely impersonal interest which I take—and I take it just because you are going the Dover Road, my dear, and it is a dangerous road for a young girl to travel.

ANNE. [*Very cool, very proud.*] I don't think I asked you to be interested in me.

LATIMER. Nobody does, my dear. But I am. Very interested. In all my fellow-travellers. It is my hobby.

LEONARD. Anne! [*He means, 'Let's get out of this.' He makes a movement to the front door.*]

LATIMER. The door is locked, Leonard.

LEONARD. [*Bending over him and putting his face very close to Latimer's.*] Ah! Then I will give you one minute in which to open it.

*Dominic has come in.*

LATIMER. Dominic, his lordship's face is just a little too close to mine. Could you—thank you! [*Leonard has started back on noticing Dominic.*] Coffee? Excellent.

*[The Footmen are there with coffee.]*

ANNE. No, thank you.

LEONARD. No, thanks.

*[He sits on another chair.]*

LATIMER. No, thank you. By the way, Dominic, did you go round to the hospital this afternoon?

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. The young gentleman is getting on nicely. He was able to take a little bread-and-milk this morning.

LATIMER. Ah, I'm glad. Nothing solid yet?

DOMINIC. No, sir. The jaw is still very tender. *[He goes out.]*

LATIMER. [*To Leonard.*] He bumped it against my knuckles last week. An impetuous young fellow. He was running away with—dear me, I forget her name—I always forget names. I think he called her Pussy. She had several children. [*Unconsciously he has shot his cuff, and sees suddenly the note he has made.*] What's this? 'Dominic—Apt



appearance of.' Ah, yes. [*He turns to Anne.*] It's very simple. A little fad of mine. There are bells everywhere in this room—in every chair, on the table, in the floor; wherever I am, I can press a bell for Dominic. He is always close at hand on reception evenings. Yes.

ANNE. That was a little warning which you were giving us just now?

LATIMER. [*Apologetically.*] Yes. I thought it better. Leonard is so impetuous. Joseph and Jacob were both amateur champions in their day. Dominic is a very heavy fall-er. He never has to fall on a man twice. If all this is quite understood at the beginning, it makes it so much easier.

ANNE. [*Getting up.*] Mr Latimer, I assure you that this is not a sudden freak of fancy, and that I know my own mind. I ask you, as a gentleman, to open the door.

LATIMER. [*Shaking his head.*] I am afraid it is impossible, Anne.  
[*She shrugs her shoulders and sits down.*]

LEONARD. [*Calm for the moment.*] So we are kept here by force?

LATIMER. Need we insist upon it? Let us rather say that you have postponed your visit to France in order to spend a few days with a friend.

LEONARD. I prefer to say force.

LATIMER. [*With a bow.*] I do not dictate your words to you. Your movements for the moment, yes. So let us say 'force.'

LEONARD. We are prisoners, in fact?

LATIMER. Within the limits of my house.

LEONARD. And if my—my wife chooses to walk out of your front door to-morrow morning, your—your fellow-conspirators would lay hands on her and stop her?

LATIMER. My dear Leonard, why should your—your wife want to walk out of the front door to-morrow? What would she want to do in the garden in November? Do be reasonable.

LEONARD. Suppose she wished to walk to the nearest police-station?

LATIMER. [*To Anne.*] Do you?

ANNE. [*With a smile.*] Could I?

LATIMER. If you stood on Leonard's shoulders you might just reach the top of the wall. . . . Dominic tells me that they have lost the key of the gates. Very careless of them.

LEONARD. Well, I'm—— It's monstrous!

ANNE. Yes, but we can't keep on saying that. Here we are

apparently, and here we have to stay. But I still want to know very much *why* Mr Latimer has this great desire for our company.

LEONARD. You have the advantage of me now, sir, but you will not always have it. The time will come when I shall demand satisfaction for this insult.

LATIMER. [*With an air—rising and bowing.*] My lord! Letters addressed to me at the Charing Cross Post Office will always be forwarded!

LEONARD. [*Slightly upset.*] This gross insult to myself and—er—my wife.

LATIMER. No, no, not your wife.

LEONARD. How dare you!

LATIMER. [*In alarm.*] Surely I haven't made a mistake. [*To Anne.*] You and he are running away together, aren't you?

LEONARD. [*A step nearer.*] Look here, sir——

ANNE. Oh, Leonard, what 's the good? We aren't ashamed of it, are we? Yes, Mr Latimer, we are running away together.

LATIMER. Of course! Why not? Leonard, *you* aren't ashamed of it, are you?

LEONARD. I object to this interference in my private affairs by a——

LATIMER. Yes, yes, but you 've said all that. It 's interfering of me, damnably interfering. But I am doing it because I want you both to be happy.

LEONARD. I can look after my own happiness.

LATIMER. *And* this lady's?

LEONARD. She is good enough to believe it.

ANNE. I am not a child. Do you think I haven't thought? The scandal, the good name I am going to lose, the position of that other woman, I have thought of all these things.

LATIMER. There is one thing of which you haven't thought, Anne.

ANNE. [*How young she is.*] I am afraid you are old-fashioned. You are going to talk to me of morality.

LATIMER. [*Smiling.*] Oh, no, I wasn't.

ANNE. [*Not heeding him.*] Living alone here, a bachelor, within these high walls which keep the world out, you believe what the fairy-books tell us, that once two people are married they live happy ever after.

LATIMER. Oh, no, I don't.

ANNE. I am the wicked woman, coming between the happy

husband and wife, breaking up the happy home. Is that it, Mr Latimer?

LEONARD. Rubbish! The happy home! Why, this is my first real chance of happiness.

LATIMER. His first real chance of happiness! As he said when he proposed to Eustasia.

LEONARD. [*Upset.*] What's that?

LATIMER. [*To Anne.*] May I ask *you* some questions now?

ANNE. Yes?

LATIMER. Eustasia will divorce him?

LEONARD. We shall not defend the suit.

LATIMER. And then you will marry Anne?

LEONARD. Another insult. I shall not forget it.

LATIMER. I beg your pardon. I simply wanted an answer.

ANNE. He will marry me.

LATIMER. I see. And then, as the fairy-books tell us, you will live happy ever after? [*Anne is silent.*]

LEONARD. I need hardly say that I shall do my best to——

LATIMER. [*To Anne.*] And then, as the fairy-books tell us, you will live happy ever after? [*Anne is silent.*] I live within my high walls which keep the world out; I am old-fashioned, Anne. You are modern, you know the world. You don't believe the fairy-books, and yet—you are going to live happy ever after?

LEONARD. I don't see what you're driving at.

LATIMER. Anne does.

ANNE. [*Raising her eyes to his.*] I take the risk, Mr Latimer.

LATIMER. But a big risk. . . . Oh, believe me, I am not so much out of the world as you think. Should I have known all about you, should I have brought you here, if I were? I know the world; I know the risks of marriage. Marriage is an art—well, it's a profession in itself. [*Sharply.*] And what are you doing? Marrying a man whose only qualification for the profession is that he has tried it once, and made a damned hash of it.

LEONARD. Well, really, sir!

LATIMER. Isn't it true?

LEONARD. Well—er—I admit my marriage has not been a happy one, but I venture to say—well, I don't wish to say anything against Eustasia——

LATIMER. Go on. Life is too short for us to be gentlemen all the time.

LEONARD. [*Explosively.*] Well, then, I say that not even St



Michael and all his angels could have made a success of it. I mean, not even St Michael.

LATIMER. Yet you chose her.

LEONARD. Er—well——

[*But he has nothing to say.*]

LATIMER. [*After a pause.*] Miss Anne, I am not being moral. You see, I am a very rich man, and we know on good authority that it is difficult for a very rich man to be a very good man. But being a very rich man I try to spend my money so that it makes somebody else happy besides myself. It's the only happy way of spending money, isn't it? And it's my hobby to prevent people—to try if I can prevent people—making unhappy marriages. . . . It's wonderful what power money gives you. Nobody realizes it, because nobody ever spends it save in the obvious ways. . . . You may say that I should have prevented Leonard from marrying Eustasia in the first place. I have done that sometimes. I have asked two young people here—oh, properly chaperoned—and guests, not prisoners as you are—two young people who thought that they were in love, and I have tried to show each to the other in the most unromantic light. . . . Sometimes the engagement has been broken off. Sometimes they have married and—lived happy ever after. . . . But mostly it is my hobby to concentrate on those second marriages into which people plunge—with no parents now to restrain them—so much more hastily even than they plunge into their first adventure. Yet how much more carefully they should be considered, seeing that one at least of the parties has already proved his utter ignorance of the art of marriage. . . . And so, my dear friends, when I hear—and a rich man has many means of hearing—when I hear that two people are taking the Dover Road, as you were taking it to-night, I venture to stop them, and say, in the words of the fairy-book, 'Are you *sure* you are going to live happy ever after?'

LEONARD. Your intentions may be good, but I can only repeat that your interference is utterly unwarranted, and you are entirely mistaken as to the power and authority which your money gives you.

LATIMER. Authority, none. But power? [*He laughs.*] Why, my dear Leonard, if I offered you a hundred thousand pounds to go back to your wife to-night, this lady would never see you again.

LEONARD. Well, of all the damnable things to say——

LATIMER. How damnable the truth is! Think it over to-night,

Leonard. You are a poor man for your position—think of all the things you could do with a hundred thousand pounds. Turn it over in your mind—and then over and over again. A hundred thousand pounds.

*[For a moment it seems as if Leonard is beginning to turn it, but Anne interrupts.]*

ANNE. *[Scornfully.]* Is this part of the treatment? Am I being shown my lover when he is mercenary?

LATIMER. *[With a laugh.]* Oh no! If that were part of my treatment, there would be no marriages at all. Oh no, it isn't a genuine offer. *[To Leonard.]* It's off, Leonard. You needn't think it out any more. *[Leonard wakes up suddenly, a poor man.]* Besides, you misunderstand me. I don't want to separate you by force—I have no right to.

ANNE. But how modest suddenly!

LATIMER. *[With a bow and a smile.]* Madam, I admire your spirit.

ANNE. Leonard, I am receiving the attentions of another man. Beware of jealousy. . . . All part of the treatment, Mr Latimer?

LATIMER. You're splendid. *[Seriously.]* But I meant what I said just now. I am not preventing you from going the Dover Road, I am only asking you to wait a few days and see how you get on. It may be that you two are the perfect soul-mates; that your union has already been decreed in Heaven and will be watched over by the angels. If so, nobody will rejoice in your happiness more than I. I shall not say: 'You have no right to be happy together. Leonard must remain with his lawfully-wedded Eustasia.' Believe me, I do not waste my money, my time, my breath in upholding the sanctity of an unhappy marriage. I was brought up in the sanctity of an unhappy marriage; even as a child I knew all about it. *[Less seriously.]* But oh, my dear Anne, let us have a little common sense before we adventure marriage with a man who is always making a mess of it. We know what Leonard is—how perfectly hopeless as a husband.

ANNE. I don't think that is quite fair.

LATIMER. Well, as far as we can tell. You've never made a happy marriage yet, have you, Leonard?

LEONARD. *[Sulkily.]* I don't want to say anything against Eustasia—

LATIMER. Good God, man, aren't you shouting it all the time? Why else are you here? But don't try to pretend that it's all Eustasia's fault.

LEONARD. [*Doubtfully.*] Well——

LATIMER. Or that it will be all Anne's fault *next* year.

LEONARD. What do you mean, next year?

LATIMER. I beg your pardon. I should have said the year after next. [*There is a little silence.*]

ANNE. [*Getting up.*] I think I will go to bed. How long do you want us to wait?

LATIMER. Can you spare a week? You with so many years in front of you.

ANNE. [*Deciding that the moment has come to put Mr Latimer in his place.*] I have a father. I left him a note to say what I was doing. We don't see much of each other, but I thought it polite. [*Triumphantly.*] Does *that* interfere with your plans at all?

LATIMER. [*Smiling.*] Not at all. There was a little mistake about the delivery of that note. Your father is under the impression that you are staying with friends—in Kent. . . . A great power, money.

ANNE. [*Deciding, with dignity, that the moment has not come.*] I congratulate you on the perfection of your methods. Good night. [*Dominic is in the room.*]

LATIMER. Her ladyship will retire.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. [*He goes out.*]

LATIMER. Good night, Miss Anne.

ANNE. [*Holding out her hand suddenly.*] Without prejudice.

LATIMER. [*Bending over it gallantly.*] Ah, but you are prejudicing me entirely.

*A maid comes in.*

MAID. This way, my lady.

[*She leads the way to a door on the right, and Anne follows her.*]

LATIMER. [*Pleasantly, to Leonard.*] And did *you* leave a note for *your* father, Leonard?

LEONARD. You ought to know. You appear to have your conspirators everywhere. Saunders—and, I suppose, Anne's maid—and God knows who else.

LATIMER. Money, Leonard, money. A pity you refused that hundred thousand pounds. You could have bribed the Archbishop of Canterbury to curse me. . . . Well, a week here won't do either of you any harm. Have a whisky and soda?



LEONARD. I am not at all sure that I ought to drink in your house.

LATIMER. You will be thirsty before you go.

LEONARD. [*Hesitating.*] Well——

*A Footman appears with the whisky.*

LATIMER. That's right. Help yourself, won't you?

LEONARD. [*Helping himself.*] Please understand that I do this, as I do everything else in your house, under protest.

LATIMER. [*Shooting his cuff and taking out his pencil.*] Your protest is noted.

LEONARD. [*Returning to the too comfortable chair.*] As I have already said, your conduct is perfectly outrageous.

*[He sinks into its depths.]*

LATIMER. And as I have already said, you can't do moral indignation from that chair. Remember what happened to you last time.

LEONARD. Perfectly outrageous.

*[He drinks.]*

LATIMER. Have another cigar?

LEONARD. I shall go to bed as soon as I have drunk this.

*[He drinks.]*

LATIMER. You wouldn't care for a game of billiards first?

LEONARD. I am not in the mood for billiards.

LATIMER. By the way, we have another runaway couple here. But their week of probation is just over. They expect to leave to-morrow.

LEONARD. I am not interested in your earlier crimes.

LATIMER. I think you would be interested in *this* couple, Leonard.

LEONARD. I assure you I am not.

LATIMER. Ah! [*Picking up a review and settling himself.*] Very good article this month by Sidney Webb. You ought to read it.

LEONARD. I am not interested in Sidney Webb.

LATIMER. Breakfast is at ten o'clock. In here.

LEONARD. [*Struggling out of his chair.*] I shall eat it under protest.

LATIMER. You're off? Then I'll say good night.

*Dominic and the two Footmen, Joseph and Jacob, have come in.*

LEONARD. [*Stiffly.*] Good night.

*[He walks up to the door on the right. Jacob is in front of it.]*

*Leonard is pulled up at sight of him. Dominic indicates the door on the left.*

DOMINIC. *This way, my lord.*

LEONARD. Er—er—thank you.

*[He goes out, followed by Joseph. . . . Mr Latimer is alone with Sidney Webb.]*

## ACT II

*It is next morning. Eustasia, Leonard's wife (who should be sitting patiently at home wondering when he will return), is having breakfast with a harmless young man called Nicholas. She is what people who talk like that call a 'nice little thing,' near enough to thirty-five to begin to wish it were twenty-five. At present she is making a good deal of fuss over this dear boy Nicholas. Breakfast is practically over. Nicholas, in fact, is wiping his mouth.*

EUSTASIA. Finished, darling?

NICHOLAS. Yes, thank you, Eustasia.

EUSTASIA. A little more toast?

NICHOLAS. No, thank you, Eustasia.

EUSTASIA. Just a little tiny teeny-weeny bit, if his Eustasia butters it for him?

NICHOLAS. No, thank you. I've really finished.

EUSTASIA. Another cup of coffee?

NICHOLAS. [*With a sigh.*] No, thank you, Eustasia.

EUSTASIA. Just a little bit of a cup if his Eustasia pours it out for her own Nicholas, and puts the sugar in with her own ickle fingers?

NICHOLAS. No more coffee, thank you.

EUSTASIA. Then he shall sit in a more comfy chair while he smokes his nasty, horrid pipe, which he loves so much better than his Eustasia. [*He gets up without saying anything.*] He doesn't really love it better?

NICHOLAS. [*Laughing uneasily,*] Of course he doesn't.

EUSTASIA. Kiss her to show that he doesn't.

NICHOLAS. [*Doing it gingerly.*] You baby!

EUSTASIA. And now give me your pipe. [*He gives it to her reluctantly. She kisses it and gives it back to him.*] There! And she doesn't really think it's a nasty, horrid pipe, and she's ever so sorry she said so. . . . Oh!

[*She sees a dish of apples suddenly.*

NICHOLAS. What is it?

EUSTASIA. Nicholas never had an apple!

NICHOLAS. Oh, no, thanks, I don't want one.



EUSTASIA. Oh, but he must have an apple! It's so good for him. An apple a day keeps the doctor away. You *must* keep the doctor away, darling, else poor Eustasia will be miserable.

NICHOLAS. [*With an effort.*] I've finished my breakfast.

EUSTASIA. Not even if his Eustasia peels it for him?

NICHOLAS. No, thank you. I assure you that I have had all I want.

EUSTASIA. Sure?

NICHOLAS. Quite sure, thank you. Where are you going to sit?

EUSTASIA. [*Indicating the sofa.*] Nicholas sit there and Eustasia sit next to him.

NICHOLAS. [*Without much enthusiasm.*] Right.

[*They sit down.*]

EUSTASIA. Shall Eustasia fill his pipe for him? [*She takes it.*]

NICHOLAS. [*Taking it back.*] No, thank you. It is filled. [*They are silent for a little, and at last he speaks uncomfortably.*] Er—Eustasia.

EUSTASIA. Yes, darling.

NICHOLAS. We've been here a week.

EUSTASIA. Yes, darling. A wonderful, wonderful week. And now to-day we leave this dear house where we have been so happy together, and go out into the world together——

NICHOLAS. [*Who has not been listening to her.*] A week. Except for the first day, we have had all our meals alone together.

EUSTASIA. [*Sentimentally.*] Alone, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS. Four meals a day—that's twenty-four meals.

EUSTASIA. Twenty-four!

NICHOLAS. And at every one of those meals you have asked me at least four times to have something more, when I had already said that I didn't want anything more; or, in other words, you have forced me to say 'No, thank you, Eustasia,' ninety-six times when there was absolutely no need for it.

EUSTASIA. [*Hurt.*] Nicholas!

NICHOLAS. [*Inexorably.*] We are both young. I am twenty-six, you are——

EUSTASIA. [*Hopefully.*] Twenty-five.

NICHOLAS. [*Looking at her quickly and then away again.*] You are twenty-five. If all goes well, we may look to have fifty years more together. Say two thousand five hundred weeks. Multiply that by a hundred, and we see that in the course of our joint lives you will, at the present rate, force me to say

'No, thank you, Eustasia,' two hundred and fifty thousand times more than is necessary. *[He relights his pipe.]*

EUSTASIA. *[Pathetically.]* Nicholas!

*[She applies her handkerchief.]*

NICHOLAS. I wondered if we couldn't come to some arrangement about it. That's all.

EUSTASIA. You're cruel! Cruel! *[She sobs piteously.]*

NICHOLAS. *[Doggedly.]* I just wondered if we couldn't come to some arrangement.

EUSTASIA. *[Completely overcome.]* Oh! Oh! Nicholas! My darling!

*[Nicholas, his hands clenched, looks grimly in front of him. He winces now and then at her sobs. He tries desperately hard not to give way, but in the end they are too much for him.]*

NICHOLAS. *[Putting his arms round her.]* Darling! Don't! *[She goes on sobbing.]* There! There! I'm sorry. Nicholas is sorry. I oughtn't to have said it. Forgive me, darling.

EUSTASIA. *[Between sobs.]* It's only because I love you so much, and w-want you to be well. And you m-must eat.

NICHOLAS. Yes, yes, Eustasia, I know. It is dear of you.

EUSTASIA. Ask any d-doctor. He would say you m-must eat.

NICHOLAS. Yes, darling.

EUSTASIA. You m-must eat.

NICHOLAS. *[Resignedly.]* Yes, darling.

EUSTASIA. *[Sitting up and wiping her eyes.]* What's a wife for, if it isn't to look after her husband when he's ill, and to see that he eats?

NICHOLAS. All right, dear, we won't say anything more about it.

EUSTASIA. And when you had that horrid cold and were so ill, the first day after we came here, I did look after you, didn't I, Nicholas, and take care of you and make you well again?

NICHOLAS. You did, dear. Don't think I am not grateful. You were very kind. *[Wincing at the recollection.]* Too kind.

EUSTASIA. Not too kind, darling. I love looking after you, and doing things for you, and taking care of you, and cosseting you. *[Thoughtfully to herself.]* Leonard was never ill.

NICHOLAS. Leonard?

EUSTASIA. My husband.

NICHOLAS. Oh! . . . I'd never thought of him as Leonard. I prefer not to think about him. I've never seen him, and I don't want to talk about him.

EUSTASIA. No, darling. I don't want to either.

NICHOLAS. We've taken the plunge and—[*bravely*] and we're not going back on it.

EUSTASIA. [*Surprised.*] Darling!

NICHOLAS. As a man of honour I—— Besides, you can't go back now—I mean I took you away, and—— Well, here we are. [*With determination.*] Here we are.

EUSTASIA. Darling, you aren't regretting?

NICHOLAS. [*Hastily.*] No, no! [*She takes out her handkerchief ominously.*] No, no, no! [*She begins to sob.*] No! No! [*He is almost shouting.*] Eustasia, listen! I love you! I'm not regretting! I've never been so happy! [*She is sobbing tumultuously.*] So happy, Eustasia! I have never, never been so happy! Can't you hear?

EUSTASIA. [*Throwing herself into his arms.*] Darling!

NICHOLAS. There, there!

EUSTASIA. [*Drying her eyes.*] Oh, Nicholas, you frightened me so! Just for a moment I was afraid you were regretting.

NICHOLAS. No, no!

EUSTASIA. How right Mr Latimer was!

NICHOLAS. [*With conviction.*] He was indeed.

EUSTASIA. How little we really knew of each other when you asked me to come away with you!

NICHOLAS. How little!

EUSTASIA. But this week has shown us to each other as we really are.

NICHOLAS. It has.

EUSTASIA. And now I feel absolutely safe. We are ready to face the world together, Nicholas.

[*She sighs and leans back happily in his arms.*]

NICHOLAS. Ready to face the world together.

[*He has his pipe in his right hand, which is round her waist. Her eyes are closed, her left hand, encircling his neck, holds his left hand. He tries to bend his head down so as to get hold of his pipe with his teeth. Several times he tries and just misses it. Each time he pulls her a little closer to him, and she sighs happily. At last he gets hold of it. He leans back with a gasp of relief.*]

EUSTASIA. [*Still with her eyes closed.*] What is it, darling?

NICHOLAS. Nothing, Eustasia, nothing. Just happiness.

[*But they are not to be alone with it for long, for Mr Latimer comes in.*]

LATIMER. Good morning, my friends, good morning.

[*They move apart and Nicholas jumps up.*]



NICHOLAS. Oh, good morning.

EUSTASIA. Good morning.

LATIMER. So you are leaving me this morning and going on your way?

NICHOLAS. [*Without enthusiasm.*] Yes.

EUSTASIA. But we shall never forget this week, dear Mr Latimer.

LATIMER. You have forgiven me for asking you to wait a little so as to make sure?

EUSTASIA. Oh, but you were so right! I was just saying so to Nicholas. Wasn't I, Nicholas?

NICHOLAS. Yes. About a minute ago. About two minutes ago.

LATIMER. And so now you are sure of yourselves?

EUSTASIA. Oh, so sure, so very sure. Aren't we, Nicholas?

NICHOLAS. Absolutely sure.

LATIMER. That's right. [*Looking at his watch.*] Well, I don't want to hurry you, but if you have any little things to do, the car will be here in half an hour, and——

EUSTASIA. Half an hour? Oh, I must fly. [*She begins.*]

NICHOLAS. [*Not moving.*] Yes, we must fly.

LATIMER. [*Going to the door with Eustasia.*] By the way, you will be interested to hear that I had two other visitors last night.

EUSTASIA [*Stopping excitedly.*] Mr Latimer! You don't mean another—couple?

LATIMER. Yes, another romantic couple.

EUSTASIA. Oh, if I could but see them before we go! Just for a moment! Just to reconcile them to this week of probation! To tell them what a wonderful week it can be!

LATIMER. You shall. I promise you that you shall.

EUSTASIA. Oh, thank you, dear Mr Latimer!

[*He goes to the door with her. As he comes back, Nicholas is coming slowly towards him.*]

NICHOLAS. I say.

LATIMER. Yes?

NICHOLAS. [*Thoughtfully.*] I say, what would you—I mean—supposing—— Because you see—I mean, it isn't as if—— Of course, *now*—— [*He looks at his watch and finishes up sadly.*] Half an hour. Well, I suppose I must be getting ready. [*He goes towards the door.*]

LATIMER. [*As he gets there.*] Er—Nicholas.

NICHOLAS. Yes?

LATIMER. Just a moment.

NICHOLAS. [*Coming back to him.*] Yes?

[*Latimer takes him by the arm, and looks round the room to see that they are alone.*]

LATIMER. [*In a loud whisper.*] Cheer up!

NICHOLAS. [*Excitedly.*] What?

[*Latimer has let go of his arm and moved away, humming casually to himself. The light dies out of Nicholas's eyes, and he shrugs his shoulders despairingly.*]

NICHOLAS. [*Without any hope.*] Well, I'll go and get ready.  
[*He goes out.*]

*Dominic comes in and begins to re-arrange the breakfast-table.*

LATIMER. Ah, good morning, Dominic.

DOMINIC. Good morning, sir. A nicish morning it seems to be, sir.

LATIMER. A very nicish morning. I have great hopes of the world to-day.

DOMINIC. I am very glad to hear it, sir.

LATIMER. We must all do what we can, Dominic.

DOMINIC. That's the only way, isn't it, sir?

LATIMER. Great hopes, great hopes.

DOMINIC. [*Handing him 'The Times.'*] The paper, sir.

LATIMER. Thank you. [*He looks at the front page.*] Any one married this morning? Dear me, quite a lot. One, two, three, four . . . ten. Ten! Twenty happy people, Dominic!

DOMINIC. Let us hope so, sir.

LATIMER. Let us hope so. . . . By the way, how was his lordship this morning?

DOMINIC. A little depressed, sir.

LATIMER. Ah!

DOMINIC. There seems to have been some misunderstanding about his luggage. A little carelessness on the part of somebody, I imagine, sir.

LATIMER. Dear me! Didn't it come with him?

DOMINIC. I'm afraid not, sir.

LATIMER. Tut-tut, how careless of somebody. Can't we lend him anything?

DOMINIC. Joseph offered to lend him a comb, sir—his own comb—a birthday present last year, Joseph tells me. His lordship decided not to avail himself of the offer.

LATIMER. Very generous of Joseph, seeing that it was a birthday present.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. Unfortunately Joseph had come down to

the last blade of his safety razor this morning. His lordship is rather upset about the whole business, sir.

LATIMER. Well, well, I dare say a little breakfast will do him good.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. Are you ready for breakfast now, sir?

*[Anne comes in. All this is rather fun. She is not so sure of Leonard now, but Leonard doesn't matter. Dover is a long way off. Meanwhile this is fun. The jolly house, the excitement of not knowing what will happen next; and Mr Latimer—to be put in his place.]*

LATIMER. *[Getting up and going to her.]* Good morning, Anne. May I hope that you slept well?

ANNE. Very well, thank you.

LATIMER. I am so glad. . . . All right, Dominic.

DOMINIC. Thank you, sir.

*[He goes out.]*

LATIMER. You are ready for breakfast?

ANNE. Quite ready. But what about Leonard?

LATIMER. Leonard?

ANNE. I made sure that I was to have a practice breakfast with Leonard this morning. I have been thinking of a few things to say up in my room.

LATIMER. *[Smiling.]* Say them to me instead.

ANNE. They are very wifely.

*[She sits down.]*

LATIMER. But think what good practice.

ANNE. Very well. *[At the cups.]* Tea or coffee, darling?

LATIMER. Oh, no, that will never do. You know by now that I always have coffee—half milk and three lumps of sugar.

ANNE. Of course, how silly of me. *[She pours out the coffee.]*

LATIMER. *[Taking the covers off the dishes.]* Omelette—fish—kidney and bacon?

ANNE. Now you're forgetting.

LATIMER. *[Putting back the covers.]* No, I'm remembering. Toast and marmalade— isn't that right?

ANNE. Quite right, dear.

LATIMER. *[To himself.]* I knew she would like marmalade. No wonder that Leonard ran away with her.

*[He puts the toast and marmalade close to her.]*

ANNE. Your coffee, darling.

LATIMER. Thank you, my love. . . . 'My love' is very con-nubial, I think.

ANNE. Delightfully so. Do go on.

LATIMER. Er—I am sorry to see in the paper this morning—



which I glanced at, my precious, before you came down——

How do you like 'my precious'?

ANNE. Wonderfully lifelike. Are you sure you haven't been married before?

LATIMER. Only once. Eustasia. You had not forgotten, Eustasia?

ANNE. I am afraid I had. In fact, I had forgotten for the moment that you were being Leonard.

LATIMER. [*Bowing.*] Thank you. I could wish no better compliment.

ANNE. [*Laughing in spite of herself.*] Oh, you're too absurd.

LATIMER. [*In Leonard's manner.*] Of course I don't wish to say anything against Eustasia——

ANNE. My dear Leonard, I really think we might leave your first wife out of it.

LATIMER. Yes, you want to get that off pat. You'll have to say that a good deal, I expect. Well, to resume. I am sorry to see in the paper this morning that Beelzebub, upon whom I laid my shirt for the 2.30 race at Newmarket yesterday—and incidentally your shirt too, darling—came in last, some five minutes after the others had finished the course. . . . Tut-tut, how annoying!

ANNE. Oh, my poor darling!

LATIMER. The word 'poor' is well chosen. We are ruined. I shall have to work.

ANNE. You know what I *want* you to do, Leonard?

LATIMER. No, I have forgotten.

ANNE. [*Seriously.*] I should like to see you in the House of Lords, taking your rightful place as a leader of men, making great speeches.

LATIMER. My dear Anne! I may be a peer, but I am not a dashed politician.

ANNE. [*Wistfully.*] I wish you were, Leonard.

LATIMER. I will be anything you like, Anne.

[*He leans towards her, half-serious, half-mocking.*]

ANNE. [*With a little laugh.*] How absurd you are! Some more coffee?

LATIMER. [*Passing his cup.*] To which I answer, 'A little more milk.' Do you realize that this goes on for fifty years?

ANNE. Well, and why not?

LATIMER. Fifty years. A solemn thought. But do not let it mar our pleasure in the meal that we are having together now. Let us continue to talk gaily together. Tell me of any

interesting dream you may have had last night—any little adventure that befell you in the bath—any bright thought that occurred to you as you were dressing.

ANNE. [*Thoughtfully.*] I had a very odd dream last night.

LATIMER. I am longing to hear it, my love.

ANNE. I dreamt that you and I were running away together, Leonard, and that we lost our way and came to what we thought was an hotel. But it was not an hotel. It was a very mysterious house, kept by a very mysterious man called Mr Latimer.

LATIMER. How very odd. Latimer? Latimer? No, I don't seem to have heard of the fellow.

ANNE. He told us that we were his prisoners. That we must stay in his house a week before we went on our way again. That all the doors were locked, and there were high walls round the garden, that the gates from the garden were locked, so that we could not escape, and that we must wait a week together in his house to see if we were really suited to each other.

LATIMER. My dear, what an extraordinary dream!

ANNE. It *was* only a dream, wasn't it?

LATIMER. Of course! What is there mysterious about this house? What is there mysterious about this — er — Mr Latimer? And as for any one being kept prisoner—here—in this respectable England—why!

ANNE. It is absurd, isn't it?

LATIMER. Quite ridiculous.

ANNE. [*Getting up—now she will show him.*] I thought it was. [*She goes to the front door and turns the handle. To her surprise the door opens. But Mr Latimer mustn't know that she is surprised.*] You see, I thought it was! [*She steps out into the garden.*] You see, the gates are open too! [*She comes back.*] What an absurd dream to have had! [*She sits down again.*]

LATIMER. There's no accounting for dreams. I had an absurd one too last night.

ANNE. What was it?

LATIMER. A lonely house. Father and daughter living together. Father old, selfish, absorbed in his work. Daughter left to herself; her only companion, books; knowing nothing of the world. A man comes into her life—the first. He makes much of her. It is a new experience for the daughter. She is grateful to him, so grateful, so very proud that she means anything to him. He tells her when it is too late that he is

married; talks of an impossible wife; tells her that she is his real mate. Let her come with him and see something of the world which she has never known. She comes. . . . Dear me, what silly things one dreams!

ANNE. Absurd things. . . . [*So he knows! He knows all about it! But she will not be treated as a child. She will carry it off yet.*] When can we have the car? [*Now she is carrying it off.*]

LATIMER. The car?

ANNE. Leonard's car.

LATIMER. You wish to continue the adventure?

ANNE. Why not?

LATIMER. Dear, dear! What a pity! [*Looking at his watch.*]  
In twenty-five minutes?

ANNE. That will do nicely, thank you.

LATIMER. We must let Leonard have a little breakfast first, if he is to cross the Channel to-day. [*He gets up.*] In twenty-five minutes then.

ANNE. [*Half holding out her hand.*] I shall see you again?

LATIMER. [*Bending over it.*] If only to wish you God-speed.

[*She looks at him for a moment, and then turns and goes out.*]

*He picks up his paper and settles with it in an arm-chair, his back to the breakfast-table. Leonard comes in. He is in a dirty, rather disreputable, once white, bath-gown. His hair is unbrushed, his cheeks—the cheeks of a dark man—unshaved and blue. He has a horrible pair of bedroom slippers on his feet, above which, not only his socks, but almost a hint of pantaloons, may be seen on the way to the dressing-gown. He comes in nervously, and is greatly relieved to find that the breakfast-table is empty. He does not notice Mr Latimer. On his way to the table he stops at a mirror on the wall, and standing in front of it, tries to persuade himself that his chin is not so bad after all. Then he pours himself out some coffee, helps himself to a kipper and falls to ravenously.*

LATIMER. Ah, good morning, Leonard.

LEONARD. [*Starting violently and turning round.*] Good Lord! I didn't know you were there.

LATIMER. You were so hungry. . . . I trust you slept well.

LEONARD. Slept well! Of all the damned draughty rooms—

Yes, and what about my luggage?

LATIMER. [*Surprised.*] Your luggage?

LEONARD. Yes, never put on the car, your fellow, what's 'is name—Joseph says.



LATIMER. Dear me, we must inquire into this. Lost your luggage? Dear me, that's a very unfortunate start for a honeymoon. That means bad luck, Leonard. [*Dominic comes in.*] Dominic, what's this about his lordship's luggage?

DOMINIC. Joseph tells me there must have been some misunderstanding about it, sir. A little carelessness on the part of somebody, I imagine, sir.

LATIMER. Dear me! Didn't it come with him?

DOMINIC. I'm afraid not, sir.

LATIMER. Tut-tut, how careless of somebody! Thank you, Dominic.

DOMINIC. Thank you, sir. [*He goes out.*]

LATIMER. Lost your luggage. How excessively annoying! [*Anxiously.*] My dear Leonard, what is it?

LEONARD. [*Whose face has been shaping for it for some seconds.*] A-tish-oo!

LATIMER. At any rate I can find you a handkerchief.

[*He does so. Leonard takes it just in time, and sneezes violently again.*]

LEONARD. Thank you.

LATIMER. Not at all. That's a very nasty cold you've got. How wise of you to have kept on a dressing-gown.

LEONARD. The only thing I had to put on.

LATIMER. But surely you were travelling in a suit yesterday? I seem to remember a brown suit.

LEONARD. That fool of a man of yours——

LATIMER. [*Distressed.*] You don't mean to tell me—— [*Dominic comes in.*] Dominic, what's this about his lordship's brown suit?

DOMINIC. Owing to a regrettable misunderstanding, sir, his lordship's luggage——

LATIMER. Yes, but I'm not talking about his twenty-five other suits, I mean the nice brown suit that he was wearing yesterday. It must be somewhere. I remember noticing it. I remember—— [*He holds up his hand.*] Just a moment, Dominic——

LEONARD. A-tish-oo!

LATIMER. I remember saying to myself: 'What a nice brown suit Leonard is wearing.' Well, where is it, Dominic?

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. I seem to remember the suit to which you are referring. I regret to say that Joseph had an unfortunate accident with it.

LEONARD. [*Growling.*] Damned carelessness.

DOMINIC. Joseph was bringing back the clothes after brushing them, sir, and happened to have them in his arms while bending over the bath in order to test the temperature of the water for his lordship. A little surprised by the unexpected heat of the water, Joseph relinquished the clothes for a moment, and precipitated them into the bath.

LATIMER. Dear me, how extremely careless of Joseph!

DOMINIC. Yes, sir, I have already reprimanded him.

LEONARD. The fellow ought to be shot.

LATIMER. You're quite right, Leonard. Dominic, shoot Joseph this morning.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

LATIMER. And see that his lordship's suit is dried as soon as possible.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. It is being dried now, sir.

LATIMER. But it must be dried thoroughly, Dominic. His lordship has a nasty cold, and——

LEONARD. A-tish-oo!

LATIMER. A very nasty one. I'm afraid you are subject to colds, Leonard?

LEONARD. The first one I've ever had in my life.

LATIMER. Do you hear that, Dominic? The first one he's ever had in his life.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. If you remember, sir, Mr Nicholas, and one or two other gentlemen who have slept there, caught a very nasty cold. Almost looks as if there must be something the matter with the room.

LEONARD. Damned draughtiest room——

LATIMER. Dear me! You should have told me of this before. We must have the room seen to at once. And be sure that his lordship has a different room to-night.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir; thank you, sir. *[He goes out.]*

LATIMER. *[Sympathetically.]* My dear fellow, I am distressed beyond words. But you know the saying, 'Feed a cold, starve a fever.' You must eat, you must eat. *[He pushes all the dishes round Leonard.]* We must be firm with this cold. We must suffocate it. *[Pressing more dishes upon him.]* You were quite right not to shave. The protection offered by the beard, though small, is salutary. But I was forgetting——perhaps your razor is lost too?

LEONARD. Damned careless fellows!

LATIMER. I must lend you mine.

LEONARD. *[Feeling his chin.]* I say, I wish you would.

LATIMER. I will get it at once. Meanwhile, eat. No half measures with this cold of yours. My poor fellow!

*[He hurries out. Just as Leonard is getting busy with his breakfast again, Anne comes in.]*

ANNE. Leonard, my dear! *[She observes him more thoroughly.]*  
My dear Leonard!

LEONARD. *[His mouth full.]* G'morning, Anne.

ANNE. *[Coldly.]* Good morning.

LEONARD. *[Getting up, napkin in hand.]* How are you this morning? *[He comes towards her, wiping his mouth.]*

ANNE. No, please go on with your breakfast. *[In alarm.]* What is it?

*[His face assumes an agonized expression. He sneezes. Anne shudders.]*

LEONARD. Got a nasty cold. Can't understand it. First I've ever had in my life.

ANNE. Do you sneeze like that much?

LEONARD. Off and on.

ANNE. Oh! . . . Hadn't you better get on with your breakfast?

LEONARD. Well, I will if you don't mind. Good thing for a cold, isn't it? Eat a lot.

ANNE. I really know very little about colds. . . . Do get on with your breakfast.

LEONARD. *[Going back.]* Well, I will, if you don't mind. You had yours?

ANNE. Yes.

LEONARD. That's right. *[Resuming it.]* Did you have one of these kippers?

ANNE. No.

LEONARD. Ah! A pity. I will say that for Latimer's cook. She knows how to do a kipper. Much more difficult than people think.

ANNE. I really know very little about kippers.

LEONARD. I have often wondered why somebody doesn't invent one without bones. *[He takes a mouthful.]* Seeing what science can do nowadays—

*[He stops. Anne's eye is on him. He says nothing, but waves his hand for her to look the other way.]*

ANNE. What is it? *[He frowns fiercely and continues to wave. She turns away coldly.]* I beg your pardon.

*[He removes a mouthful of bones.]*

LEONARD. *[Cheerfully.]* Righto, darling. . . . After all what



do they *want* all these bones for? Other fish manage without them. *[He continues his kipper.]*

ANNE. Leonard, when you can spare me a moment I should like to speak to you.

LEONARD. *[Eating.]* My darling, all my time is yours.

ANNE. I should like your undivided attention if I can have it.

LEONARD. Fire away, darling, I'm listening.

ANNE. *[Going up to him.]* Have you finished your—kipper?

*[She takes the plate away.]* What are you going to have next?

LEONARD. Well—what do you recommend?

ANNE. *[Taking off a cover.]* Omelette? I don't think it has any bones.

LEONARD. What's in that other dish? *[She takes off the cover.]*

Kidneys? What are the kidneys like?

ANNE. Well, you can see what they *look* like.

LEONARD. Did you try one?

ANNE. *[Impatiently.]* They're delightful, I tried several. *[She helps him.]* There! Got the toast? Butter? Salt? What is it?

LEONARD. Pepper.

ANNE. Pepper—there. Now have you got everything?

LEONARD. Yes, thank you, my dear.

*[He picks up his knife and fork.]*

ANNE. *[Putting them down again.]* Then before you actually begin, I have something I want to say to you.

LEONARD. You're very mysterious. What is it?

ANNE. There is nothing mysterious about it at all. It's perfectly plain and obvious. Only I do want you to grasp it.

LEONARD. Well? *[He blows his nose. She waits for him to finish.]* Well? *[He is still flourishing his handkerchief. She waits patiently. He puts it back in his pocket.]* Well?

ANNE. The car will be here in a quarter of an hour.

LEONARD. The car?

ANNE. The automobile.

LEONARD. But whose?

ANNE. Ours. More accurately, yours.

LEONARD. But what for?

ANNE. *[Patiently.]* We are running away together, dear. You and I. It had slipped your memory perhaps, but I assure you it is a fact. The car will take us to Dover, and the boat will take us to Calais, and the train will take us to the south of France. You and I, dear. When you've finished your breakfast.

LEONARD. But what about Latimer?

ANNE. Just you and I, dear. Two of us only. The usual number. We shall not take Mr Latimer.

LEONARD. My dear Anne, you seem quite to have forgotten that this confounded fellow Latimer has got us prisoners here until he chooses to let us go. [*With dignity.*] I have not forgotten. I eat his kidneys now, but he shall hear from me afterwards. Damned interference!

ANNE. Have you been dreaming, Leonard? *Before* all these kippers and kidneys and things?

LEONARD. Dreaming?

ANNE. The car will be here in a quarter of an hour. Why not? It is *your* car. This is England; this is the twentieth century. We missed the boat and spent the night here. We go on our way this morning. Why not?

LEONARD. Well, you know, I said last night it was perfectly ridiculous for Latimer to talk that way. I mean, what has it got to do with *him*? Just a bit of leg-pulling—that's what I felt all the time. Stupid joke. [*Picking up his knife and fork.*] Bad taste too.

ANNE. You did hear what I said, didn't you? The car will be here in a quarter of an hour. I don't know how long it takes you to—[*she glances him over*—to shave, and—and dress properly, and—and brush your hair, but I fancy you ought to be thinking about it quite seriously. [*Kindly.*] You can have some more kidneys another time.

LEONARD. B-but I can't possibly go like this.

ANNE. No, that's what I say.

LEONARD. I mean I haven't got any luggage for one thing—and, with a cold like this, I'm not at all sure——

ANNE. You've lost your luggage?

LEONARD. Apparently it was left behind by——

ANNE. [*With anger.*] You let yourself be tricked and humiliated by this Mr Latimer, you let *me* be humiliated, and then when I say that, whatever happens, I won't be humiliated, you—you lose your luggage!

LEONARD. I didn't lose it. It just happens to *be* lost.

ANNE. And you catch a cold!

LEONARD. I didn't catch it. It caught *me*.

ANNE. The—the humiliation of it! . . . And what do you propose to do now?

LEONARD. As soon as my luggage turns up, and I am well enough to travel——

ANNE. Meanwhile you accept this man's hospitality——

LEONARD. Under protest. [*Helping himself from the dish.*] I shall keep a careful account of everything that we have here——

ANNE. Well, that's your third kidney; you'd better make a note of it.

LEONARD. [*With dignity.*] As it happens I was helping myself to a trifle more bacon. . . . As I say, I shall keep a careful account, and send him a cheque for our board and lodging as soon as we have left his roof.

ANNE. Oh! . . . I had some coffee and one slice of toast and a little marmalade. About a spoonful. And a cup of tea and two thin slices of bread and butter upstairs. Oh, and I've had two baths. They're extra, aren't they? A hot one last night and a cold one this morning. I think that's all. Except supper last night, and you wouldn't let me finish that, so I expect there'll be a reduction. . . . You want a note-book with one of those little pencils in it.

LEONARD. [*Reproachfully.*] I say, Anne, look here——

ANNE. Do go on with your breakfast.

LEONARD. You're being awfully unfair. How can we possibly go now? Why, I haven't even got a pair of trousers to put on.

ANNE. You're not going to say you've lost those too!

LEONARD. [*Sulkily.*] It's not my fault. That fellow—what's his name——

ANNE. [*Wonderingly.*] What made you ever *think* that you could take anybody to the south of France? Without any practice at all? . . . Now, if you had been taking an aunt to Hammersmith—well, you might have lost a bus or two . . . and your hat might have blown off . . . and you would probably have found yourselves at Hampstead the first two or three times . . . and your aunt would have stood up the whole way . . . but still you might have got there eventually. I mean, it would be worth trying—if your aunt was very anxious to get to Hammersmith. But the south of France! My dear Leonard! It's so audacious of you.

LEONARD. [*Annoyed.*] Now, look here, Anne——

[*Mr Latimer comes in cheerily with shaving-pot, brush, safety-razor, and towel.*]

LATIMER. Now then, Leonard, we'll soon have you all right. [*He puts the things down.*] Ah, Anne! You don't mind waiting while Leonard has a shave? He wanted to grow a special beard for the Continent, but I persuaded him not to. The



French accent will be quite enough. [*Picking up the razor.*]  
Do you mind Wednesday's blade? I used Tuesday's myself  
this morning.

ANNE. [*All sweetness in a moment.*] Oh, Mr Latimer, I find that  
we shall not want the car after all.

LATIMER. No?

ANNE. No. Poor Leonard is hardly well enough to travel. I  
hope that by to-morrow, perhaps—— But I am afraid that  
we must trespass on your hospitality until then. I am so  
sorry.

LATIMER. But I am charmed to have you. Let me tell your  
maid to unpack.

ANNE. Don't trouble, thanks. I've got to take my hat off.  
[*Very lovingly for Latimer's benefit.*] I shan't be a moment,  
Leonard darling.

[*She goes out, her chin in the air. She is still carrying it off.*]

LATIMER. Now then, Leonard darling, to work.

LEONARD. [*Picking up the things.*] Thanks.

LATIMER. But where are you going?

LEONARD. Upstairs, of course.

LATIMER. Is that wise? With a cold like yours?

LEONARD. Damn it, I can't shave down here.

LATIMER. Oh, come, we mustn't stand on ceremony when your  
life is at stake. You were complaining only five minutes ago  
of the draught in your room. Now, here we have a nice even  
temperature——

LEONARD. Well, there's something in that.

LATIMER. There's everything in it. Of course you've never  
had a cold before, so you don't know, but any doctor will tell  
you how important it is to stay in one room—with a nice even  
temperature. You mustn't dream of going upstairs.

LEONARD. [*Surrendering.*] Well——

LATIMER. That's right. Got everything you want? There are  
plenty of mirrors. Which period do you prefer? Queen  
Anne?

LEONARD. It's all right, thanks.

LATIMER. Good. Then I'll leave you to it.

[*He goes out. Standing in front of a glass on the wall, Leonard  
applies the soap. His cheeks are just getting beautifully  
creamy when Nicholas enters.*]

NICHOLAS. Hallo!

LEONARD. [*Looking round.*] Hallo!

NICHOLAS. Shaving?

LEONARD. [*Exasperated.*] Well, what the devil did you think I was doing?

NICHOLAS. Shaving.

[*He sits down. Leonard gets on with the good work.*]

LEONARD. A-tish-oo!

NICHOLAS. Got a cold?

LEONARD. Obviously.

NICHOLAS. [*Sympathetically.*] Horrid, sneezing when you're all covered with soap.

LEONARD. Look here, I didn't ask for your company, and I don't want your comments.

NICHOLAS. Well, if it comes to that, I was here first, and I didn't ask you to shave in the hall.

LEONARD. [*With dignity.*] There are reasons why it is necessary for me to shave in the hall.

NICHOLAS. Don't bother to tell me. I know 'em.

LEONARD. What do you mean?

NICHOLAS. You're the couple that arrived last night.

LEONARD. [*Looking at him, thoughtfully.*] And you're the couple that is leaving this morning.

NICHOLAS. Exactly.

LEONARD. Yes, but I don't see——

NICHOLAS. You haven't tumbled to it yet?

LEONARD. Tumbled to what?

NICHOLAS. The fact that a week ago there were reasons why it was necessary for *me* to shave in the hall.

LEONARD. You! . . . You don't mean——

NICHOLAS. Yes, I do.

LEONARD. You lost your luggage?

NICHOLAS. Yes.

LEONARD. You woke up with a cold?

NICHOLAS. Yes. . . . Horrid, sneezing when you're all covered with soap.

LEONARD. [*Excitedly.*] I say, that fellow—what's 'is name—didn't drop *your* clothes in the bath?

NICHOLAS. Oh, rather. . . . Damned smart chap, Latimer.

LEONARD. Damned scoundrel.

NICHOLAS. Oh, no. He's quite right. One learns a lot down here.

LEONARD. I shall leave his house at once . . . as soon as I have shaved.

NICHOLAS. You still want to? [*Leonard looks at him in surprise.*]  
Oh, well, you've hardly been here long enough, I suppose.

LEONARD. What do you mean? Don't *you* want to any more?

NICHOLAS. Latimer's quite right, you know. One learns a lot down here.

LEONARD. [*Shaving.*] What about the lady?

NICHOLAS. That's the devil of it.

LEONARD. My dear fellow, as a man of honour, you're bound to go on.

NICHOLAS. As a man of honour, ought I ever to have started?

LEONARD. [*Little knowing.*] Naturally I can't give an opinion on that.

NICHOLAS. No. . . . You want to be careful with that glass. The light isn't too good. I should go over it all again.

LEONARD. [*Stiffly.*] Thank you. I am accustomed to shaving myself.

NICHOLAS. I was just offering a little expert advice. You needn't take it.

LEONARD. [*Surveying himself doubtfully.*] H'm, perhaps you're right. [*He lathers himself again. In the middle of it he stops and says :*] Curious creatures, women.

NICHOLAS. Amazing.

LEONARD. It's a life's work in itself trying to understand 'em. And then you're no further.

NICHOLAS. A week told *me* all I wanted to know.

LEONARD. They're so unexpected.

NICHOLAS. So unreasonable.

LEONARD. What was it the poet said about them?

NICHOLAS. What didn't he say?

LEONARD. No, *you* know the one I mean. How does it begin?  
. . . 'O woman, in our hours of ease——'

NICHOLAS. 'Uncertain, coy and hard to please.'

LEONARD. That's it. Well, I grant you *that*——

NICHOLAS. Grant it me! I should think you do! They throw it at you with both hands.

LEONARD. But in the next two lines he misses the point altogether. When—what is it?—'When pain and anguish wring the brow'——

NICHOLAS. [*With feeling.*] 'A ministering angel thou.'

LEONARD. Yes, and it's a lie. It's simply a lie.

NICHOLAS. My dear fellow it's the truest thing anybody ever said. Only—only one gets too much of it.

LEONARD. True? Nonsense!

NICHOLAS. Evidently you don't know anything about women.

LEONARD. [*Indignantly.*] I! Not know anything about women!



NICHOLAS. Well, you said yourself just now that you didn't.

LEONARD. I never said—— What I said——

NICHOLAS. If you did know anything about 'em, you 'd know that there 's nothing they like more than doing the ministering angel business.

LEONARD. Ministering angel!

NICHOLAS. Won't you have a little more of this, and won't you have a little more of that, and how is the poor cold to-day, and——

LEONARD. You really think that women talk like that?

NICHOLAS. How else do you think they talk?

LEONARD. My dear fellow! . . . Why, I mean, just take my own case as an example. Here am I, with a very nasty cold, the first I've ever had in my life. I sit down for a bit of breakfast—not wanting it particularly, but feeling that, for the sake of my health, I ought to try and eat something. And what happens?

*[Latimer has come in during this speech. He stops and listens to it.]*

LATIMER. *[Trying to guess the answer.]* You eat too much.

LEONARD. *[Turning round angrily.]* Ah, so it's you! You have come just in time, Mr Latimer. I propose to leave your house at once.

LATIMER. *[Surprised.]* Not like that? Not with a little bit of soap behind the ear? *[Leonard hastily wipes it.]* The other ear. *[Leonard wipes that one.]* That's right.

LEONARD. At once, sir.

NICHOLAS. You'd better come with us. We're just going.

LEONARD. Thank you.

LATIMER. Four of you. A nice little party.

*Anne comes in.*

LEONARD. Anne, my dear, we are leaving the house at once. Are you ready?

ANNE. But——

EUSTASIA. *[From outside.]* Nich-o-las!

*[Leonard looks up in astonishment.]*

NICHOLAS. *[Gloomily.]* Hallo!

EUSTASIA. Where are you?

NICHOLAS. Here!

*Eustasia comes in.*

EUSTASIA. Are you ready, darling? *[She stops on seeing them all, and looks from one to the other. She sees her husband.]* Leonard!

NICHOLAS. [*Understanding.*] Leonard!

LEONARD. Eustasia!

ANNE. Eustasia!

[*They stare at each other—open-mouthed—all but Mr Latimer. Mr Latimer has picked up 'The Times,' and seems to have forgotten that they are there. . . .*]

ANNE. [*After hours and hours.*] Oh, isn't anybody going to say anything? Mr Latimer, while Leonard is thinking of something, you might introduce me to his wife.

LATIMER. [*Recalled suddenly from the leading article.*] I beg your pardon! Eustasia, this is Anne.

ANNE. How do you do?

[*Not that she minds.*]

EUSTASIA. How do you do?

[*Nor she.*]

LATIMER. Leonard, this is Nicholas.

NICHOLAS. [*Nodding.*] We've met. Quite old friends.

LEONARD. [*Indignantly.*] I repudiate the friendship. We met under false pretences. I—I—— Well, upon my word, I don't know *what* to say.

NICHOLAS. Then don't say it, old boy. Here we all are, and we've got to make the best of it.

LEONARD. I—I—a-tish-oo!

EUSTASIA. [*Alarmed.*] Leonard, you have a cold?

NICHOLAS. A very nasty cold.

ANNE. [*Coldly.*] It will be better when he has finished his breakfast.

LEONARD. [*Hurt.*] I *have* finished my breakfast. A long time ago.

ANNE. I beg your pardon. [*She indicates the towel round his neck.*] I misunderstood.

LEONARD. [*Pulling it away.*] I've been shaving.

EUSTASIA. But, Leonard dear, I don't understand. I've never known you ill before.

LEONARD. I never have been ill before. But I am ill now. Very ill. And nobody minds. Nobody minds at all. This fellow Latimer invaygles me here—

LATIMER. Inveegles.

LEONARD. I shall pronounce it how I like. It is quite time I asserted myself. I have been too patient. You invaygle me here and purposely give me a cold. You—[*pointing accusingly to Anne*—are entirely unmoved by my sufferings, instead of which you make fun of the very simple breakfast which I had forced myself to eat. You—[*to Nicholas*—run away with my wife, at a time when I am ill and unable to protect her, and

you—[*to Eustasia*—well, all I can say is that you surprise me, Eustasia, you surprise me. I didn't think you had it in you.

LATIMER. A masterly summing up of the case. Well, I hope you're all ashamed of yourselves.

EUSTASIA. But, Leonard, how rash of you to *think* of running away with a cold like this. [*She goes up and comforts him.*] You must take care of yourself—Eustasia will take care of you and get you well. Poor boy! He had a nasty, nasty cold, and nobody looked after him. Mr Latimer, I shall want some mustard, and hot water, and eucalyptus.

LATIMER. But of course!

LEONARD. [*To Anne.*] There you are! As soon as somebody who really understands illness comes on the scene, you see what happens. Mustard, hot water, eucalyptus—she has it all at her finger-ends.

*Enter Dominic.*

DOMINIC. Yes, sir?

LATIMER. A small mustard and water for his lordship.

EUSTASIA. It's to put his feet in, not to drink.

LATIMER. A large mustard and water.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

EUSTASIA. Hot water.

DOMINIC. Yes, my lady.

EUSTASIA. And if you have any eucalyptus—

DOMINIC. Yes, my lady; we got some in specially for his lordship.

LATIMER. Did Mr Nicholas absorb all the last bottle?

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

NICHOLAS. [*With feeling.*] I fairly lived on it.

DOMINIC. [*To Eustasia.*] Is there anything else his lordship will require?

NICHOLAS. What about a mustard plaster?

LEONARD. Please mind your own business.

EUSTASIA. No, I don't think there's anything else, thank you.

NICHOLAS. Well, I call that very unfair. I had one.

LEONARD. [*Asserting his rights as a husband.*] Oh, did you?

Well, in that case, Eustasia, I certainly don't see why—

LATIMER. [*To Dominic.*] Two mustard plasters. We mustn't grudge his lordship anything.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

[*He retires.*]

EUSTASIA. [*To Leonard.*] Now come over here, darling, away from the door. [*She leads him to an arm-chair in the corner of the room.*] Lean on me.



ANNE. Surely one can walk with a cold in the head!

NICHOLAS. No, it's very dangerous.

LATIMER. Nicholas speaks as an expert.

EUSTASIA. [*Settling Leonard.*] There! Is that comfy?

LEONARD. Thank you, Eustasia.

EUSTASIA. We'll soon have you all right, dear.

LEONARD. [*Pressing her hand.*] Thank you.

LATIMER. [*After a little silence.*] Well, as Nicholas said just now: 'Here we all are, and we've got to make the best of it.' What are we all going to do?

ANNE. Please leave me out of it. [*She is beaten, but that doesn't matter. The only thing that matters now is to get out of this horrible house.*] I can make my own arrangements. [*She gives them a cool little bow as she goes out.*] If you will excuse me.

*Dominic comes in with a clinical thermometer on a tray.*

DOMINIC. I thought that her ladyship might require a thermometer for his lordship's temperature.

EUSTASIA. Thank you. I think it would be safer just to take it. And I wondered if we couldn't just put this screen round his lordship's chair.

DOMINIC. Certainly, my lady, one can't be too careful.

*[He helps her with it.]*

EUSTASIA. Yes, that's right.

LATIMER. [*To Nicholas.*] Did you have the screen?

NICHOLAS. Oh, rather.

LATIMER. And the thermometer?

NICHOLAS. Yes. . . . Funny thing was I liked it just at first.

I don't mean the actual thermometer, I mean all the fussing.

LATIMER. It's a wonderful invention, a cold in the head. It finds you out. There's nothing like it, Nicholas, nothing.

EUSTASIA. [*To Dominic.*] Thank you. And you're bringing the other things?

DOMINIC. Yes, my lady, as soon as ready. *[He goes out.]*

EUSTASIA. Thank you. [*To Leonard.*] Now, dear, under the tongue. *[She puts it in his mouth.]*

LEONARD. [*Mumbling.*] I don't think I ever—

EUSTASIA. No, dear, don't try to talk.

*[And now it is the turn of Nicholas.]*

NICHOLAS. [*Coming close to Latimer.*] I say—

LATIMER. Well?

NICHOLAS. [*Indicating the screen.*] I say, not too loud.

LATIMER. [*In a whisper.*] Well?

NICHOLAS. Well, what about it?

LATIMER. What about what?

NICHOLAS. I mean, where do I come in? As a man of honour, oughtn't I to—er—— You see what I mean? Of course I want to do the right thing.

LATIMER. Naturally, my dear Nicholas. It's what one expected of you.

NICHOLAS. I thought that if I slipped away now, unostentatiously . . .

LATIMER. With just a parting word of farewell——

NICHOLAS. Well, that was what I was wondering. Would anything in the nature of a farewell be in good taste?

LATIMER. I see your point.

NICHOLAS. Don't think that I'm not just as devoted to Eustasia as ever I was.

LATIMER. But you feel that in the circumstances you could worship her from afar with more propriety.

NICHOLAS. [*Waving a hand at the screen.*] Yes. You see, I had no idea that they were so devoted.

LATIMER. But their devotion may not last for ever.

NICHOLAS. Exactly. That's why I thought I'd slip away now.

LATIMER. Oh, Nicholas! Oh, Nicholas!

NICHOLAS. [*A little offended.*] Well, I don't want to say anything against Eustasia——

LATIMER. The house is full of people who don't want to say anything against Eustasia.

NICHOLAS. But, you see—— Look out, here's Miss Anne.

*Anne comes in.*

LATIMER. Anne, you're just in time. Nicholas wants your advice.

NICHOLAS. I say, shut up! We can't very well——

ANNE. [*With all that is left of her dignity, but she is only a child after all.*] Mr Latimer, I went upstairs to get my things and find my way to the nearest railway station. But—but there is a reason why I am not going after all. Just yet. I thought I'd better tell you.

LATIMER. Were you really thinking of going? [*She nods.*] I'm so glad you've changed your mind.

ANNE. [*With a smile.*] There are reasons why I had to.

LATIMER. Bless them! . . . Nicholas, I believe she stayed just so that she might help you.

ANNE. What does Mr Nicholas want?

NICHOLAS. I say, it's awfully good of you and all that, but this is rather—I mean, it's a question that a fellow ought to settle for himself.

LATIMER. What he means is, ought *he* to get his things and find his way to the nearest railway station?

ANNE. [*Dismayed.*] Oh, no!

LATIMER. There you are, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS. [*Rather flattered.*] Oh, well—well—— [*He looks at her admiringly.*] Well, perhaps you're right.

EUSTASIA. [*The three minutes up.*] There!

[*She takes the thermometer out and comes from behind the screen in order to get nearer the light.*]

LATIMER. His temperature! This is an exciting moment in the history of the House of Lords.

[*He follows Eustasia to the window.*]

NICHOLAS. [*To Anne.*] I say, do you really think I ought to stay?

ANNE. Please, Mr Nicholas, I want you to stay.

NICHOLAS. Righto! then I'll stay.

LATIMER. [*Over Eustasia's shoulder.*] A hundred and nine.

LEONARD. [*Putting his head round the screen.*] I say, what ought it to be?

NICHOLAS. Ninety-eight.

LEONARD. Good Lord! I'm dying!

EUSTASIA. It's just ninety-nine. A little over normal, Leonard, but nothing to matter.

LATIMER. *Ninety-nine*—so it is. I should never have forgiven myself if it had been a hundred and nine.

NICHOLAS. [*Coming up to Latimer.*] It's all right, I'm going to.

EUSTASIA. [*Surprised.*] Going to? Going to what?

NICHOLAS. [*Confused.*] Oh, nothing.

LATIMER. What he means is that he is going to be firm. He thinks we all ought to have a little talk about things. Just to see where we are.

EUSTASIA. Well, things aren't quite as they were, are they? If I'd known that Leonard was ill—but I've seen so little of him lately. And he's *never* been ill before!

NICHOLAS. Of course we ought to know where we are.

LATIMER. Yes. At present Leonard is behind that screen, which makes it difficult to discuss things properly. Leonard, could you——



EUSTASIA. Oh, we mustn't take any risks! But if we moved the screen a little, and all sat up at that end of the room——

LATIMER. Delightful!

NICHOLAS. [*Leading the way.*] Sit here, Miss Anne, won't you?  
[*They arrange themselves. Latimer in the middle.*]

LATIMER. There! Now, are we all here? . . . We are. Then with your permission, ladies and gentlemen, I will open the proceedings with a short speech.

NICHOLAS. Oh, I say, must you?

LATIMER. Certainly.

EUSTASIA. [*To Leonard.*] Hush, dear.

LEONARD. I didn't say anything.

EUSTASIA. No, but you were just going to.

LATIMER. [*Severely.*] Seeing that I refrained from making my speech when Leonard had the thermometer in his mouth, the least he can do now is to listen in silence.

LEONARD. Well, I 'm——

LATIMER. I resume. . . . By a fortunate concatenation of circumstances, ladies and gentlemen—or, as more illiterate men would say, by a bit of luck—two runaway couples have met under my roof. No need to mention names. You can all guess for yourselves. But I call now—this is the end of my speech, Leonard—I call now upon my noble friend on the right to tell us just why he left the devoted wife by his side in order to travel upon the Continent.

LEONARD. Well, really——

LATIMER. Naturally Leonard does not wish to say anything against Eustasia. Very creditable to him. But can it be that the devoted wife by his side wishes to say anything against Leonard?

EUSTASIA. You neglected me, Leonard, you know you did. And when I was so ill——

LEONARD. My dear, you were *always* ill. That was the trouble.

LATIMER. And you were never ill, Leonard. *That* was the trouble. . . . You heartless ruffian!

EUSTASIA. [*To Leonard.*] Hush, dear.

LATIMER. Why couldn't you have had a cold sometimes? Why couldn't you have come home with a broken leg, or lost your money, or made a rotten speech in the House of Lords? If she could never be sorry for *you*, for whom else could she be sorry, except herself? [*To Eustasia.*] I don't suppose he even lost his umbrella, did he?

ANNE. [*Feeling that anything is possible to a man who mislays his trousers.*] Oh, he must have lost that.

LATIMER. Eustasia, ladies and gentlemen, is one of those dear women, those sweet women, those delightful women—[*aside to Anne*—stop me if I 'm overdoing it—those adorable women who must always cosset or be cosseted. She couldn't cosset Leonard; Leonard wouldn't cosset her. Hence—the Dover Road.

EUSTASIA. How well you understand, Mr Latimer!

LATIMER. Enter, then, my friend Nicholas. [*Shaking his head at him.*] Oh, Nicholas! Oh, Nicholas! Oh, Nicholas!

NICHOLAS. [*Uneasily.*] What 's all that about?

LATIMER. Anything you say will be used in evidence against you. Proceed, my young friend.

NICHOLAS. Well—well—well—I mean, there she was.

LATIMER. Lonely.

NICHOLAS. Exactly.

LATIMER. Neglected by her brute of a husband—[*as Leonard opens his mouth*] fingers crossed, Leonard—who spent day and night rioting in the House of Lords while his poor little wife cried at home.

NICHOLAS. Well——

LATIMER. 'Then out spake bold Sir Nicholas'—[*aside to Anne*] this was also composed in my bath——

'Then out spake bold Sir Nicholas,  
An Oxford man was he;  
"Lo, I will write a note to-night  
And ask her out to tea."'

NICHOLAS. Well, you see——

LATIMER. I see, Nicholas. . . . And so here we all are.

ANNE. Except me.

LATIMER. I guessed at you, Anne. Did I guess right?

ANNE. [*Meekly.*] Yes.

LATIMER. And so here we all are. . . . And what are we all going to do? My house is at your disposal for as long as you wish. The doors are open for those who wish to go. . . . Eustasia?

EUSTASIA. My duty is to stay here—to look after my husband.

LATIMER. Well, that settles Eustasia. . . . Anne?

ANNE. Of necessity I must stay here—for the present.

LATIMER. Well, that settles Anne. . . . Nicholas?

NICHOLAS. I stay here too—[*looking at Anne*] from choice.

LATIMER. Well, that settles Nicholas. . . . Leonard?

*[Dominic, followed by all the Staff, comes in, together with a collection of mustard-baths, plasters, eucalyptus, etc. etc.]*

LATIMER. *[Looking round at the interruption.]* Ah! . . . And this will settle Leonard.

*[It settles him.]*



### ACT III

*Three days later, and evening again. Anne is busy with a pencil and paper, an 'ABC,' and her purse. She is trying to work out how much it costs to go home, and subtracting three and fourpence halfpenny from it. Having done this, she puts the paper, pencil, and purse in her bag, returns the 'ABC' to its home, and goes towards the door. One gathers that she has come to a decision.*

ANNE. [*Calling.*] Nich-o-las!

NICHOLAS. [*From outside.*] Hallo!

ANNE. Where—are—you?

NICHOLAS. Coming. [*He comes.*] Just went upstairs to get a pipe. [*Putting his hand to his pocket.*] And now I've forgotten it. [*They go to the sofa together.*

ANNE. Oh, Nicholas, how silly you are! [*She sits down.*

NICHOLAS. [*Sitting close.*] I don't want to smoke, you know.

ANNE. I thought men always did.

NICHOLAS. Well, it depends what they're doing.

[*There is no doubt what he is doing. He is making love to Anne, the dog, and Anne is encouraging him.*

ANNE. [*Looking away.*] Oh!

NICHOLAS. I say, it has been rather jolly here the last three days, don't you think?

ANNE. It has been rather nice.

NICHOLAS. We've sort of got so friendly.

ANNE. We have, haven't we?

NICHOLAS. You've been awfully nice to me.

ANNE. You've been nice to me.

NICHOLAS. I should have gone, you know, if it hadn't been for you.

ANNE. I don't know *what* I should have done if you had gone.

NICHOLAS. You did ask me to stay, didn't you?

ANNE. Yes, I couldn't let you go.

NICHOLAS. Do you know what you said? You, said, 'Please, Mr Nicholas, I want you to stay.' I shall always remember that. [*Fatuously to himself.*] 'Please, Mr Nicholas, I want you to stay.' I wonder what made you think of saying that?

ANNE. I wanted us to be friends. I wanted to get to know you; to make you think of me as—as your friend.

NICHOLAS. We *are* friends, Anne, aren't we?

ANNE. I think we are now, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS. [*With a sentimental sigh.*] Friends!

[*Anne looks at him, wondering if she shall risk it; then away again; then summons up her courage and takes the plunge.*]

ANNE. Nicholas!

NICHOLAS. Yes?

ANNE. [*Timidly.*] I—I want you to do something for me.

NICHOLAS. Anything, Anne, anything.

ANNE. I don't know whether I ought to ask you.

NICHOLAS. Of course you ought!

ANNE. But you see, we *are* friends—almost like brother and sister——

NICHOLAS. [*Disappointed.*] Well, I shouldn't put it quite like that——

ANNE. And I thought I might ask you——

NICHOLAS. Of course, Anne! You know I would do anything for you.

ANNE. Yes. . . . Well—well—— [*In a rush.*] Well, then, will you lend me one pound two and sixpence till next Monday?

NICHOLAS. Lend you——!

ANNE. To-day's Friday, I'll send you the money off on Sunday. I promise. Of course I know one oughtn't to borrow from men, but you're different. Almost like a brother. I knew you would understand.

NICHOLAS. But—but—I *don't* understand.

ANNE. [*Ashamed.*] You see, I—I only have three and fourpence halfpenny. And it costs one pound five and twopence to get home. [*Indignantly.*] Oh, it's a shame the way men always pay for us, and then when we really want money we haven't got any. . . . But I will pay you back on Sunday. I have some money at home; I meant to have brought it.

NICHOLAS. But—but why do you suddenly——?

ANNE. Suddenly? I've been wanting it ever since that first morning. I went upstairs to get my hat, meaning to walk straight out of the house—and then I looked in my purse and found—[*pathetically*] three and fourpence halfpenny. What was I to do?

NICHOLAS. Any one would have lent you anything.

ANNE. [*Coldly.*] Leonard, for instance?

NICHOLAS. [*Thoughtfully.*] Well . . . no. . . . No. You couldn't very well have touched Leonard. But Latimer——

ANNE. Mr Latimer! The man who had brought us here, locked us up here, and started playing Providence to us—I was to go on my knees to *him* and say, 'Please, dear Mr Latimer, could you lend me one pound two and sixpence, so that I may run away from your horrid house?' Really!

NICHOLAS. Well, you seem to have been pretty friendly with him these three days.

ANNE. Naturally I am polite to a man when I am staying in his house. That's different.

NICHOLAS. As a matter of fact, Latimer has been jolly decent. Anyway, he has saved us both from making silly asses of ourselves.

ANNE. And you think I am grateful to him for that? . . . Doesn't *any* man understand *any* woman?

NICHOLAS. [*Annoyed.*] Are you suggesting that *I* don't understand women?

ANNE. I'm suggesting that you should lend me one pound two shillings and sixpence.

NICHOLAS. [*Sulkily, feeling in his pockets.*] Of course, if you're in such a confounded hurry to get away from here—— Do you mind all silver?

ANNE. Not at all.

NICHOLAS.—in such a confounded hurry to get away from here—— [*He counts the money.*]

ANNE. Why ever should I want to stay?

NICHOLAS. Well—well—— [*With a despairing shrug.*] Oh, Lord! . . . Ten shillings . . . fourteen and six . . . why should she want to stay! Why do you think *I*'m staying?

ANNE. [*Wickedly.*] Because you're so fond of Mr Latimer. He's so jolly decent.

NICHOLAS. [*Looking at the money in his hand.*] One pound two shillings and sixpence. I suppose if I told you what I really thought about it all, you'd get on your high horse again and refuse the money from *me*. So I won't tell you. Here you are.

ANNE. [*Gently.*] You didn't think I was in love with you, Nicholas? [*Nicholas looks uncomfortable.*] In three days? Oh, Nicholas!

NICHOLAS. Well—well, I don't see——

[*He holds out the money. But Anne won't take it on those terms.*]



ANNE. From a friend?

NICHOLAS. From a friend.

ANNE. Lent to a friend?

NICHOLAS. Lent to a friend.

ANNE. [*Taking it.*] Thank you, Nicholas. [*She hurries out, clasping the precious money. Nicholas will never see her again. . . . And then, suddenly, her head comes round the door.*] Thank you very much, Nicholas! [*She is gone.*]

NICHOLAS. Well, I'm damned!

[*He sits there gloomily, his legs stretched out, and regards his shoes. So far as we can tell he goes on saying, 'Well, I'm damned' to himself. Eustasia and Leonard come in. He is properly dressed now, but still under Eustasia's care, and she has his arm, as if he were attempting a very difficult feat in walking across the hall.*]

NICHOLAS. [*Looking round.*] Hallo! [*Getting up.*] Do you want to come here?

LEONARD. [*Hastily.*] Don't go, old boy, don't go. Plenty of room for us all.

EUSTASIA. Thank you so much. Leonard is not very strong yet. His temperature is up again to-day. [*To Leonard.*] You will be better on the sofa, darling. [*Distantly to Nicholas.*] I'm so sorry to trouble you.

NICHOLAS. Not at all. I was just going anyhow.

LEONARD. [*Sitting on the sofa.*] Oh, nonsense. Stay and talk to us. Plenty of room for us all.

NICHOLAS. [*Feeling in his pockets.*] Got to get my pipe. Left it upstairs, like an ass.

LEONARD. [*Taking out his case.*] Have a cigarette instead?

NICHOLAS. Rather have a pipe, thanks. [*He makes for the door.*]

LEONARD. [*Anxiously.*] But you'll come back?

NICHOLAS. [*Unwillingly.*] Oh—er—righto. [*He goes out.*]

LEONARD. Come and keep us company. [*To Eustasia, who is tucking him up.*] Thanks, Eustasia, thanks. That's quite all right.

EUSTASIA. Another cushion for your back, darling?

LEONARD. No, thanks.

EUSTASIA. Quite sure?

LEONARD. Quite sure, thanks.

EUSTASIA. I can easily get it for you.

LEONARD. [*Weakly.*] Oh, very well.

EUSTASIA. That's right. [*Getting the cushion.*] You must be comfortable. Now, are you sure *that's* all right?

LEONARD. Quite all right, thank you.

EUSTASIA. Sure, darling? Anything else you want, I can get it for you at once. A rug over your knees?

LEONARD. No, thank you, Eustasia. [*Now he is saying it.*]

EUSTASIA. You wouldn't like a hot-water bottle?

LEONARD. [*With a sigh.*] No, thank you, Eustasia.

EUSTASIA. You've only got to say, you know. Now shall we talk, or would you like me to read to you?

[*She settles down next to him.*]

LEONARD. [*Choosing the lesser evil.*] I think read—no, I mean, talk—no, read to me.

EUSTASIA. It's for you to say, darling.

LEONARD. [*His eyes closed.*] Read to me, Eustasia.

EUSTASIA. [*Opening her book.*] We'll go on from where we left off. We didn't get very far—I marked the place. . . . Yes, here we are. ' . . . the sandy deserts of Arabia and Africa . . . 4.' And then there's a little footnote at the bottom; that's how I remember it. [*Reading the footnote.*] 'Tacit. *Annal.* l. ii, Dion Cassius l. lvi, p. 833 and the speech of Augustus himself.' That doesn't seem to mean much. 'It receives great light from the learned notes of his French translator, M. Spanheim.' Well, that's a good thing. Spanheim—sounds more like a German, doesn't it? Now are you sure you're quite comfortable, dear?

LEONARD. [*His eyes closed.*] Yes, thank you, Eustasia.

EUSTASIA. Then I'll begin. [*In her reading-aloud voice.*] 'Happily for the repose of mankind, the moderate system recommended by the wisdom of Augustus was adopted by the fears and vices of his immediate successors. Engaged in the pursuit of pleasure or the exercise of tyranny, the first Caesars seldom showed themselves to the armies or to the provinces; nor were they disposed to suffer that those triumphs which their indolence neglected should be usurped by the conduct and valour of their lieutenants.' [*Speeding up.*] 'The military fame of a subject was considered as an insolent invasion of the Imperial prerogative; and it became the duty as well as interest of every Roman general to guard the frontiers entrusted to his care'—[*recklessly*] 'without aspiring for conquests which might have proved no less fatal to himself than to the vanquished barbarians.' . . . And then there's another little footnote. Perhaps it would be better if I read all the little footnotes afterwards—what do you think, darling? Or shall we take them as they come?



LEONARD. [*Without opening his eyes.*] Yes, dear.

EUSTASIA. Very well. This is footnote 5. 'Germanicus, Suetonius Paulinus, and Agricola'—[*she stumbles over the names*]—'were checked and recalled in the course of their victories. Corbulo was put to death.' Oh, what a shame! 'Military merit, as it is admirably expressed by Tacitus, was, in the strictest sense of the word——' well, there are *two* words, and they are both in Latin. I suppose Tacitus wrote in Latin. But it doesn't really matter, because it's only a little footnote. [*Anxiously.*] Are you liking the book, darling?

LEONARD. Very much, dear.

EUSTASIA. It's nicely written, but I don't think it's very exciting. I don't think Mr Latimer has a very good taste in books. I asked him to recommend me something really interesting to read aloud, and he said that the two most interesting books he knew were Carlyle's *French Revolution* and—and—[*looking at the cover*] Gibbon's *Roman Empire*. . . . Fancy, there are four volumes of it and six hundred pages in a volume. We're at page 3 now. [*She reads a line or two to herself.*] Oh, now, this is rather interesting, because it's all about *us*. 'The only accession which the Roman Empire received during the first century of the Christian era was the province of Britain.' Fancy! 'The proximity of its situation to the coast of Gaul seemed to invite their arms, the pleasing though doubtful intelligence of a pearl fishery attracted their avarice.' And then there's a little footnote—I suppose that's to say it was Whitstable. [*Getting to it.*] Oh, no—'The British pearls proved, however, of little value, on account of their dark and livid colour.' How horrid. 'Tacitus observes——' well, then, Tacitus says something again. . . . I *wish* he would write in English. . . . Now where was I? Something about the pearls. Oh yes. 'After a war of about forty years'—good gracious!—'undertaken by the most stupid, maintained by the most dissolute, and——' [*Nicholas returns with his pipe.*]

NICHOLAS. Oh, sorry, I'm interrupting.

LEONARD. [*Waking up.*] No, no. Eustasia was just reading to me. [*To her.*] You mustn't tire yourself, dear. [*To Nicholas.*] Stay and talk.

NICHOLAS. What's the book? Carlyle's *French Revolution*?

EUSTASIA. [*Primly.*] Certainly not. [*Looking at the title again.*] Gibbon's *Roman Empire*.

NICHOLAS. Any good?

EUSTASIA. Fascinating, isn't it, Leonard?



LEONARD. Very.

NICHOLAS. You ought to try Carlyle, old chap.

LEONARD. Is *he* good?

NICHOLAS. [*Who has had eight pages read aloud to him by Eustasia.*] Oh, topping.

EUSTASIA. [*Looking at her watch.*] Good gracious! I ought to be dressing.

LEONARD. [*Looking at his.*] Yes, it is about time.

NICHOLAS. [*Looking at his.*] Yes.

EUSTASIA. Leonard, darling, I don't think it would be safe for you to change. Not to-night; to-morrow if you like.

LEONARD. I say, look here, you said that last night.

EUSTASIA. Ah, but your temperature has gone up again.

NICHOLAS. I expect that's only because the book was so exciting.

LEONARD. Yes, that's right.

EUSTASIA. But I took his temperature *before* I began reading.

NICHOLAS. Perhaps yesterday's instalment was still hanging about a bit.

EUSTASIA. [*To Leonard.*] No, darling, not to-night. Just to please his Eustasia.

LEONARD. [*Sulkily.*] All right.

EUSTASIA. That's a good boy. [*She walks to the door, Nicholas going with her to open it.*] And if he's *very* good, and Eustasia is *very* quick dressing, perhaps she'll read him another little bit of that nice book before dinner. [*She goes out.*]

LEONARD. I say, don't go, old chap. You can change in five minutes.

NICHOLAS. Righto.

[*He comes back. There is silence for a little.*]

LEONARD. I say!

NICHOLAS. Yes?

LEONARD. [*Thinking better of it.*] Oh; nothing.

NICHOLAS. [*After a pause.*] Curious creatures, women.

LEONARD. Amazing.

NICHOLAS. They're so unexpected.

LEONARD. So unreasonable.

NICHOLAS. Yes. . . .

LEONARD. [*Suddenly.*] I hate England at this time of year.

NICHOLAS. So do I.

LEONARD. Do you go south as a rule?

NICHOLAS. As a rule.

LEONARD. Monte?

NICHOLAS. Sometimes. We *had* thought—I half thought of Nice.

LEONARD. Not bad. We were—I think I prefer Cannes myself.

NICHOLAS. There's not much in it.

LEONARD. No. . . . [*After a pause.*] Between ourselves, you know—quite between ourselves—I'm about fed up with women.

NICHOLAS. Absolutely.

LEONARD. You are too?

NICHOLAS. Rather. I should think so.

LEONARD. They're so dashed unreasonable.

NICHOLAS. So unexpected. . . .

LEONARD. [*Suddenly.*] Had you booked your rooms?

NICHOLAS. At Nice? Yes.

LEONARD. So had I.

NICHOLAS. At Cannes?

LEONARD. Yes. . . . I say, what about it?

NICHOLAS. Do you mean—— [*He waves a hand at the door.*]

LEONARD. Yes.

NICHOLAS. Evaporating?

LEONARD. Yes. Quite quietly, you know.

NICHOLAS. Without ostentation.

LEONARD. That's it.

NICHOLAS. It's rather a scheme. And then we shouldn't waste the rooms. At least, only one set of them. I'll tell you what. I'll toss you whether we go to Nice or Cannes.

LEONARD. Right. [*He takes out a coin and tosses.*]

NICHOLAS. Tails.

LEONARD. [*Uncovering the coin.*] Heads. Do you mind coming to Cannes?

NICHOLAS. Just as soon, really. When shall we go? To-morrow?

LEONARD. Mightn't get a chance to-morrow. Why not to-night?

It seems a pity to waste the opportunity.

NICHOLAS. You mean while Eustasia's dressing?

LEONARD. The—er—opportunity. Sleep the night at Dover and cross to-morrow morning.

NICHOLAS. She'll be after us.

LEONARD. Nonsense.

NICHOLAS. My dear man, you don't know Eustasia.

LEONARD. I don't know Eustasia? Well!

NICHOLAS. [*With conviction.*] She'll be after you like a bird. You've never seen Eustasia when she has got somebody ill to look after.

LEONARD. I've never seen Eustasia? Well!

NICHOLAS. My dear chap, you've only had three days of her; I've had six. . . . Lord! . . . Look here. We shall have to——

*Enter Latimer.*

LATIMER. What, Leonard, all alone?

NICHOLAS. I say, you're the very man we want.

LEONARD. [*Frowning.*] S'sh.

LATIMER. Leonard, don't 's'sh' Nicholas when he wants to speak to me.

NICHOLAS. [*To Leonard.*] It's all right, old chap, Latimer is a sportsman.

LATIMER. [*To Leonard.*] There! You see the sort of reputation I have in the West End. [*To Nicholas.*] What is it you want to do? Run away?

LEONARD. Well—er——

NICHOLAS. I say, how ever did you guess?

LATIMER. Leonard's car has had steam up for the last twenty-four hours, waiting for a word from its owner.

LEONARD. [*Seeing the south of France.*] By Jove!

LATIMER. And you are going with him, Nicholas?

NICHOLAS. Yes. Thought I might as well be getting on. Very grateful and all that, but can't stay here for ever.

LATIMER. [*Wondering what has happened between Nicholas and Anne.*] So you are going too! I thought—— Well! Nicholas is going too.

LEONARD. I say, you do understand—I mean about—er—I mean, when I'm quite well again—start afresh and all that. Cosset *her* a bit. But when you're ill—or supposed to be ill—— Well, I mean, ask Nicholas.

NICHOLAS. Oh, rather.

LATIMER. My dear Leonard, why these explanations? Who am I to interfere in other people's matrimonial affairs? You and Nicholas are going away—good-bye. [*He holds out his hand.*]

NICHOLAS. Yes, but what about Eustasia? She's not going to miss the chance of cosseting Leonard just when she is getting into it. She'll be after him like a bird.

LATIMER. I see. So you want me to keep her here?

NICHOLAS. That's the idea, if you could.

LATIMER. How can I keep her here if she doesn't want to stay?

LEONARD. Well, how do you keep *anybody* here?



LATIMER. Really, Leonard, I am surprised at you. By the charm of my old-world courtesy and hospitality, of course.

LEONARD. Oh! Well, I doubt if that keeps Eustasia.

LATIMER. [*Shaking his head sadly.*] I am afraid that that is only too true. In fact, the more I think of it, the more I realize that there is only one thing which will keep this devoted wife from her afflicted and suffering husband.

LEONARD and NICHOLAS. What?

*Dominic comes in.*

LATIMER. His lordship and Mr Nicholas are leaving at once. His lordship's car will wait for them outside the gates. See that a bag is packed for them.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

LATIMER. And come back when you've seen about that.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. [*He goes out.*]

LATIMER. The car can return for the rest of your luggage, and take it over in the morning.

NICHOLAS. Good!

LEONARD. Er—thanks very much. [*Anxiously.*] What were you going to say about the only way of—er—

LATIMER. The only way of keeping this devoted wife from her afflicted and suffering husband?

LEONARD. [*Gruffly.*] Yes. What is it?

LATIMER. Somebody else must have a temperature. Somebody else must be ill. Eustasia must have somebody else to cosset.

NICHOLAS. I say, how awfully sporting of you!

LATIMER. Sporting?

NICHOLAS. To sacrifice yourself like that.

LATIMER. I? You don't think *I* am going to sacrifice myself, do you? No, no, it's Dominic.

DOMINIC. [*Coming in.*] Yes, sir.

LATIMER. Dominic, are you ever ill?

DOMINIC. Never, sir, barring a slight shortness of the breath.

LATIMER. [*To the others.*] That's awkward. I don't think you can cosset a shortness of breath.

NICHOLAS. [*To Dominic.*] I say, you could pretend to be ill, couldn't you?

DOMINIC. With what object, sir?

NICHOLAS. Well—er—

LATIMER. Her ladyship is training to be a nurse. She has already cured two very obstinate cases of nasal catarrh

accompanied by debility and a fluctuating temperature. If she brings one more case off successfully, she earns the diploma and the gold medal of the Royal Therapeutical Society.

NICHOLAS. That's right.

DOMINIC. And you would wish me to be that third case, sir?

NICHOLAS. That's the idea.

DOMINIC. And be cosseted back to health by her ladyship?

LATIMER. Such would be your inestimable privilege.

DOMINIC. I am sorry, sir. I must beg respectfully to decline.

NICHOLAS. I say, be a sport.

LEONARD. [*Awkwardly.*] Of course we should—— Naturally you would not—er—lose anything by—er——

LATIMER. His lordship wishes to imply that not only would your mental horizon be widened during the period of convalescence, but that material blessings would also flow. Isn't that right, Leonard?

NICHOLAS. A commission on the gold medal. Naturally.

DOMINIC. I am sorry, sir. I am afraid I cannot see my way.

NICHOLAS. I say——

LATIMER. Thank you, Dominic.

DOMINIC. Thank you, sir. [*He goes out.*]

NICHOLAS. Well, that's torn it. [*To Latimer.*] If you're quite sure that you wouldn't like to have a go? It's the chance of a lifetime to learn all about the French Revolution.

LATIMER. Well, well! Something must be done. [*He smiles suddenly.*] After all, why not?

LEONARD. [*Eagerly.*] You will?

LATIMER. I will.

NICHOLAS. I say——

LATIMER. [*Waving them off.*] No, no. Don't wait. Fly.

LEONARD. Yes, we'd better be moving. Come on!

NICHOLAS. [*With a grin, as he goes.*] There's an awfully good bit in the second chapter——

LATIMER. [*Holding up a finger.*] Listen! I hear her coming.

LEONARD. Good Lord!

[*They fly. Latimer, left alone, gives himself up to thought. What illness shall he have? He rings one of his many bells, and Dominic comes in.*]

LATIMER. Oh, Dominic. In consequence of your obstinate good-health, I am going to sacrifice myself—I mean, I myself am going to embrace this great opportunity of mental and spiritual development.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. Very good of you, I'm sure, sir.

LATIMER. What sort of illness would you recommend?

DOMINIC. How about a nice sprained ankle, sir?

LATIMER. You think that would go well?

DOMINIC. It would avoid any interference with the customary habits at meal-time, sir. There's a sort of monotony about bread-and-milk; no inspiration about it, sir, whether treated as a beverage or as a comestible.

LATIMER. I hadn't thought about bread-and-milk.

DOMINIC. You'll find that you will have little else to think about, sir, if you attempt anything stomachic. Of course you could have the usual nasty cold, sir.

LATIMER. No, no, not that. Let us be original. . . .

DOMINIC. How about xerostomia, sir? Spelt with an x.

LATIMER. Is that good?

DOMINIC. Joseph tells me that his father has had it for a long time.

LATIMER. Oh! Then perhaps we oughtn't to deprive him of it.

DOMINIC. I looked it up in the dictionary one Sunday afternoon, sir. They describe it there as 'an abnormal dryness of the mouth.'

LATIMER. I said I wanted to be original, Dominic.

DOMINIC. Quite so, sir. *[They both think in silence.]*

LATIMER. Perhaps I had better leave it to the inspiration of the moment.

EUSTASIA. *[Off.]* Dominic! Dominic!

DOMINIC. This appears to be the moment, sir.

LATIMER. Quick. *[Bustling him off.]* Don't let her ladyship come in for a moment. I must assume a recumbent position.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. *[He goes out.]*

*[Latimer lies down at full length on the sofa and begins to groan; putting a hand first on his stomach, then on his head, then on his elbow. Eustasia does not come. He cautiously raises his head; the room is empty.]*

LATIMER. *[Disappointedly.]* Throwing it away!

*[He hears footsteps, and settles down again.]*

*[Anne comes in, hat on, bag in hand. She is just at the door when a groan reaches her. She stops. Another groan comes. She puts down her bag and comes towards the sofa with an 'Oh!' of anxiety.]*

LATIMER. Oh, my poor—er—head! *[He clasps it.]*

ANNE. *[Alarmed.]* What is it? *[She kneels by him.]*

LATIMER. Oh, my—— *[Cheerfully.]* Hallo, Anne, is it you? *[He sits up.]*



ANNE. [*Still anxious.*] Yes, what is it?

LATIMER. [*Bravely.*] Oh, nothing, nothing. A touch of neuralgia.

ANNE. Oh! . . . You frightened me.

LATIMER. Did I, Anne? I'm sorry.

ANNE. You were groaning so. I thought—I didn't know what had happened. . . . [*Sympathetically.*] Is it very bad?

LATIMER. Not so bad as it sounded.

ANNE. [*Taking off her gloves.*] I know how bad it can be. Father has it sometimes. Then I have to send it away.

[*She has her gloves off now.*] May I try?

LATIMER. [*Remorsefully.*] Anne!

[*She leans over from the back of him and begins to stroke his forehead with the tips of her fingers. He looks up at her.*]

ANNE. Close your eyes.

LATIMER. Ah, but I don't want to now.

[*She laughs without embarrassment.*]

ANNE. It will go soon.

LATIMER. Not too soon. . . .

ANNE. [*Laughing suddenly.*] Aren't faces funny when they're upside down?

LATIMER. You have the absurdest little upside-down face that ever I saw, Anne.

ANNE. [*Happily.*] Have I?

LATIMER. Why do you wear a hat on your chin? [*She laughs.*]  
Why do you wear a hat?

ANNE. I was going away.

LATIMER. Without saying good-bye?

ANNE. [*Ashamed.*] I—I think so.

LATIMER. Oh, Anne!

ANNE. [*Hastily.*] I should have written.

LATIMER. A post card!

ANNE. A letter.

LATIMER. With many thanks for your kind hospitality, yours sincerely.

ANNE. Yours *very* sincerely.

LATIMER. PS.—I shall never see you again.

ANNE. PS.—I shall never forget.

LATIMER. Ah, but you *must* forget. . . .

ANNE. [*After a pause.*] Is it better?

LATIMER. [*Lazily.*] It is just the same. It will always be the same. It is unthinkable that anything different should ever

happen. In a hundred years' time we shall still be like this. You will be a little tired, perhaps; your fingers will ache; but I shall be lying here, quite, quite happy.

ANNE. You shall have another minute—no more.

LATIMER. Then I shall go straight to the chemist and ask for threepennyworth of Anne's fingers. [*They are silent for a little. Then she stops and listens.*] What is it?

ANNE. I heard something. Whispers.

LATIMER. Don't look round.

[*Leonard and Nicholas, in hats and coats, creep cautiously in. Very noiselessly, fingers to lips, they open the front door and creep out.*]

ANNE. What was it? Was it——

LATIMER. An episode in your life. Over, buried, forgotten. . . .

ANNE. [*Pleadingly.*] It never really happened, did it?

LATIMER. Of course not! We must have read about it somewhere—or was it in a play?

ANNE. [*Eagerly.*] That was it! We were in a box together.

LATIMER. Munching chocolates. [*With a sigh.*] What a child she was—that girl in the play—with her little, funny, grown-up airs!

*Dominic comes in, and stops suddenly on seeing them.*

DOMINIC. Oh, I beg your pardon, sir.

LATIMER. Go on, Anne. [*Happily.*] I am having neuralgia, Dominic.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. A stubborn complaint, as I have heard, sir.

LATIMER. Miss Anne is making me well. . . . What do you want?

DOMINIC. Her ladyship says will you please excuse her if she is not down to-night.

LATIMER. [*To Anne.*] Shall we excuse her if she is not down to-night?

DOMINIC. The fact is, sir, that Joseph is taken ill suddenly, and——

LATIMER. [*To himself.*] I never thought of Joseph!

ANNE. Oh, poor Joseph! What is it?

DOMINIC. A trifling affection of the throat, but necessitating careful attention, her ladyship says.

LATIMER. Please tell her ladyship how very much I thank her for looking after Joseph . . . and tell Joseph how very sorry I am for him.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

[*He goes out.*]

LATIMER. You can't go now, Anne. You will have to stay and chaperone Eustasia and me. [*She laughs and shakes her head.*] Must you go?

ANNE. Yes.

LATIMER. Back to your father?

ANNE. Yes. [*He looks at her. She is so very pretty ; so brave.*]

LATIMER. [*It must be somebody else speaking—he hardly recognizes the voice.*] Let us say good-bye now. There is a magic in your fingers which goes to my head, and makes me think ridiculous things. Let us say good-bye now.

ANNE. [*Taking his hand.*] Good-bye! [*Impulsively.*] I wish you had been my father.

[*Then she goes out. And she has won, after all. For Mr Latimer stands there dumb, wondering what has happened. He walks across to a mirror to have a look at himself. While he is there, Dominic comes in to superintend the laying of the table.*]

LATIMER. [*At the mirror.*] Dominic, how old would you say I was?

DOMINIC. More than that, sir.

LATIMER. [*With a sigh.*] Yes, I'm afraid I am. And yet I look very young. Sometimes I think I look too young.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir.

LATIMER. Miss Anne has just asked me to be her father.

DOMINIC. Very considerate of her, I'm sure, sir.

LATIMER. Yes. . . . To prevent similar mistakes in the future, I think I shall wear a long white beard.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. Shall I order one from the Stores?

LATIMER. Please.

DOMINIC. Thank you, sir. . . . Is Miss Anne leaving us, sir?

LATIMER. Yes. . . . Don't overdo the length, Dominic, and I like the crinkly sort.

DOMINIC. Yes, sir. . . . One of our most successful weeks on the whole, if I may say so, sir.

LATIMER. [*Thoughtfully.*] Yes. . . . Well, well, we must all do what we can, Dominic.

DOMINIC. That's the only way, isn't it, sir?

[*They stand looking at each other. Just for a moment Dominic is off duty. That grave face relaxes ; the eyes crease into a smile. Mr Latimer smiles back. . . . Very gently they begin to laugh together ; old friends ; master and servant no longer. 'Dear, dear ! These children !' says Dominic's laugh. 'How very amusing they are, to be*



*sure !' Latimer's laugh is a little rueful ; a moment ago he, too, was almost a child. Yet he laughs. 'Good old Dominic !'*

*[Suddenly the front-door bell rings. Instinctively they stiffen to attention. They are on duty again. They turn and march off, almost, as it were, saluting each other ; Mr Latimer to his quarters, Dominic to his bolts and bars. He draws the curtains and opens the big front door.]*

A MANLY VOICE. Oh, is this—er—an hotel?

DOMINIC. A sort of hotel, your Grace.

HIS GRACE. *[Coming in, a lady on his arm.]* My chauffeur said—we've had an accident—been delayed on the way—he said that—

*[Evidently another romantic couple. Let us leave them to Mr Latimer.]*

*Heralal Ganja*

CURTAIN

**Title**

### Author

**Accession No.**

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# HAY FEVER

NOEL COWARD



## CHARACTERS

JUDITH BLISS	MYRA ARUNDEL
DAVID BLISS	RICHARD GREATHAM
SOREL BLISS	JACKIE CORYTON
SIMON BLISS	SANDY TYRELL

CLARA

ACT I—*Saturday afternoon*

ACT II—*Saturday evening*

ACT III—*Sunday morning*

*The action of the play takes place in the hall of the Blissés' house  
at Cookham in June*

---

This play was produced at the Ambassadors Theatre, London,  
on 8 June 1925, with the following cast of characters:

JUDITH BLISS	.	.	Miss Marie Tempest
DAVID BLISS	.	.	Mr W. Graham Browne
SOREL BLISS	.	.	Miss Helen Spencer
SIMON BLISS	.	.	Mr Robert Andrews
MYRA ARUNDEL	.	.	Miss Hilda Moore
RICHARD GREATHAM	.	.	Mr Athole Stewart
JACKIE CORYTON	.	.	Miss Ann Trevor
SANDY TYRELL	.	.	Mr Patrick Susands
CLARA	.	.	Miss Minnie Rayner

## ACT I

SCENE: *The hall of David Bliss's house is very comfortable and extremely untidy. There are several of Simon's cartoons scattered about the walls, masses of highly-coloured American and classical music strewn about the piano, and comfortable furniture. A staircase ascends to a small balcony leading to the bedrooms, David's study, and Simon's room. There is a door leading to the library down left. A service door above it under the stairs. There are french windows at back and the front door on the right.*

*When the curtain rises it is about three o'clock on a Saturday afternoon in June. Simon, in an extremely dirty tennis shirt and baggy grey flannel trousers, is kneeling in the middle of the floor, drawing on cartridge paper, of which there are two pieces by him. Sorel, more neatly dressed, is stretched on left end of the sofa, reading a very violently-bound volume of poems which have been sent to her by an aspiring friend.*

SOREL. Listen to this, Simon.

[*She reads.*]

'Love's a Trollop stained with wine,  
Clawing at the breasts of Adolescence,  
Nuzzling, tearing, shrieking, beating—  
God, why were we fashioned so!'

[*She laughs.*]

SIMON. [*Looking up from his drawing.*] The poor girl's potty!

SOREL. I wish she hadn't sent me the beastly book. I must say something nice about it.

SIMON. The binding's very dashing.

SOREL. She used to be such fun before she married that gloomy little man.

SIMON. She was always a fierce *poseuse*. It's so silly of people to try and cultivate the artistic temperament. *Au fond* she's just a normal, bouncing Englishwoman.

SOREL. You didn't shave this morning.

SIMON. I know I didn't, but I'm going to in a minute, when I've finished this.

[*Pointing to drawing.*]

- SOREL. I sometimes wish *we* were more normal and bouncing, Simon.
- SIMON. Why? *[Starts to draw again.]*
- SOREL. I should like to be a fresh, open-air girl with a passion for games.
- SIMON. Thank God you're not.
- SOREL. It would be so soothing.
- SIMON. Not in this house.
- SOREL. Where's mother?
- SIMON. In the garden, practising.
- SOREL. Practising?
- SIMON. *[Stops drawing and looks at Sorel.]* She's learning the names of the flowers by heart.
- SOREL. What's she up to?
- SIMON. I don't know. *[Looks down at drawing.]* Damn! That's crooked.
- SOREL. I *always* distrust her when she becomes the squire's lady.
- SIMON. So do I. *[Starts drawing again.]*
- SOREL. She's been at it hard all day—she tapped the barometer this morning.
- SIMON. She's probably got a plan about impressing somebody.
- SOREL. *[Taking a cigarette from table behind sofa.]* I wonder who.
- SIMON. Some dreary, infatuated young man will appear soon, I expect.
- SOREL. Not to-day? *[Lights cigarette.]* You don't think she's asked any one down to-day, do you?
- SIMON. *[Stops drawing and looks up.]* I don't know. Has father noticed anything?
- SOREL. No; he's too immersed in work.
- SIMON. Perhaps Clara will know.
- SOREL. Yell for her.
- SIMON. *[Rises and goes up centre, calling off door below stairs.]* Clara! Clara! . . .
- SOREL. *[Moves to right end of sofa.]* Oh, Simon, I *do* hope she hasn't asked any one down to-day.
- SIMON. *[Coming down to right end of sofa.]* Why? Have you?
- SOREL. Yes.
- SIMON. *[Crossly.]* Why on earth didn't you tell me?
- SOREL. I didn't think you'd care one way or another.
- SIMON. Who is it?
- SOREL. Richard Greatham.



SIMON. [*Goes back to drawing.*] How exciting! I've never heard of him.

SOREL. I shouldn't flaunt your ignorance if I were you—it makes you look silly.

SIMON. [*Rising and picking up one sheet of cartridge paper and pencil.*] Well, that's done. [*He rolls up the cartridge paper.*

SOREL. Everybody's heard of Richard Greatham.

SIMON. [*Amiably.*] How lovely for them! [*Going to piano.*

SOREL. He's a frightfully well-known diplomatist—I met him at the Mainwarings' dance.

SIMON. He'll need all his diplomacy here. [*Puts pencil on piano.*

SOREL. I warned him not to expect good manners, but I hope you'll be as pleasant to him as you can.

SIMON. [*Gently—moves to centre.*] I've never met any diplomats, Sorel, but as a class I'm extremely prejudiced against them. They're so suave and polished and debonair.

SOREL. You could be a little more polished without losing caste.

SIMON. [*Moves to Sorel.*] Will he have the papers with him?

SOREL. What papers?

SIMON. [*Vaguely.*] Oh, any papers.

[*Goes up centre and puts paper on chair.*

SOREL. I wish you'd confine your biting irony to your caricatures, Simon.

SIMON. [*Coming down to Sorel.*] And I wish you'd confine your girlish infatuations to London, and not force them on your defenceless family.

SOREL. I shall keep him out of your way as much as possible.

SIMON. Do, darling. [*Goes to piano and lights cigarette.*

*Enter Clara from door below stairs. She is a hot, round, untidy little woman. She stands left by door.*

SIMON. [*Sits on form by piano.*] Clara, has mother asked any one down this week-end?

CLARA. I don't know, dear. There isn't much food in the house, and Amy's got toothache.

SOREL. I've got some oil of cloves somewhere.

CLARA. She tried that, but it only burnt her tongue. The poor girl's been writhing about in the scullery like one o'clock.

SOREL. You haven't forgotten to put those flowers in the Japanese room?

SIMON. The Japanese room is essentially feminine, and entirely unsuited to the Pet of the Foreign Office.

SOREL. Shut up, Simon!

CLARA. The room looks lovely, dear—you needn't worry. Just like your mother's dressing-room on a first night.

SIMON. How restful!

CLARA. [*Moves to Sorel.*] Have you told her about your boy friend?

SOREL. [*Pained.*] Not boy friend, Clara.

CLARA. [*Picks up drawing that Simon has left on floor centre.*]  
Oh, well, whatever he is. [*Puts drawing on chair up centre.*

SIMON. I think Sorel's beginning to be ashamed of us all, Clara—I don't altogether blame her; we are very slap-dash.

CLARA. [*Coming down centre—speaking to Simon.*] Are you going to leave that picture in the guests' bathroom, dear? I don't know if it's quite the thing—lots of pink, naked women rolling about in a field.

SIMON. [*Severely.*] Nudity can be very beautiful, Clara.

CLARA. Oh, can it! Perhaps being a dresser for so long 'as spoilt me eye for it. [*Goes out door below stairs.*

SIMON. Clara's looking tired. We ought to have more servants and not depend on her so much.

SOREL. You know we can never keep them. You're right about us being slap-dash, Simon. I wish we weren't.

SIMON. Does it matter?

SOREL. It must, I think—to other people.

SIMON. It's not our fault—it's the way we've been brought up.

SOREL. Well, if we're clever enough to realize that, we ought to be clever enough to change ourselves.

SIMON. I'm not sure that I want to.

SOREL. We're so awfully bad-mannered.

SIMON. Not to people we like.

SOREL. The people we like put up with it because they like *us*.

SIMON. What do you mean, exactly, by bad manners? Lack of social tricks and small talk?

SOREL. We never attempt to look after people when they come here.

SIMON. Why should we? It's loathsome being looked after.

SOREL. Yes, but people like little attentions. We've never once asked any one if they've slept well.

SIMON. I consider *that* an impertinence, anyhow.

SOREL. I'm going to try to improve.

SIMON. [*Puts feet upon form.*] You're only going on like this because you've got a mania for a diplomatist. You'll soon return to normal.

SOREL. [*Earnestly.*] Abnormal, Simon—that's what we are. Abnormal. People stare in astonishment when we say what we consider perfectly ordinary things. I just remarked at Freda's lunch the other day how nice it would be if someone invented something to make all our faces go up like the Chinese, because I was so bored with them going down. And they all thought I was mad!

SIMON. It's no use worrying, darling; we see things differently, I suppose, and if people don't like it they must lump it.

[*Enter Judith from the garden. She is carrying an armful of flowers and wearing a tea-gown, a large garden hat, gauntlet gloves, and goloshes.*]

JUDITH. [*Coming down to behind sofa table.*] You look awfully dirty, Simon. What have you been doing?

SIMON. [*Nonchalantly.*] Not washing very much.

JUDITH. [*Puts basket on table, and starts to take off gloves.*] You should, darling, really. It's so bad for your skin to leave things about on it.

SOREL. Clara says Amy's got toothache.

JUDITH. Poor dear! There's some oil of cloves in my medicine cupboard. Who is Amy?

SOREL. The scullery-maid, I think.

JUDITH. [*Puts gloves on table and comes centre.*] How extraordinary! She doesn't look Amy a bit, does she? Much more Flossie. Give me a cigarette. [*Simon gives her a cigarette from box on piano.*] Delphiniums are those stubby red flowers, aren't they?

SIMON. [*Lights cigarette for Judith.*] No, darling; they're tall and blue.

JUDITH. Yes, of course. The red ones are somebody's name—asters, that's it. I knew it was something opulent. [*Sits on stool below piano. Simon takes off her goloshes and puts them by the side of the stool.*] I do hope Clara has remembered about the Japanese room.

SOREL. Japanese room!

JUDITH. Yes; I told her to put some flowers in it and take Simon's flannels out of the wardrobe drawer.

SOREL. So did I.

JUDITH. [*Ominously.*] Why?

SOREL. [*Airily.*] I've asked Richard Greatham down for the week-end—I didn't think you'd mind.

JUDITH. [*Rises and crosses to Sorel.*] Mind! How dared you do such a thing?



SOREL. He's a diplomatist.

JUDITH. [*Goes behind table and starts to sort out flowers.*] That makes it much worse. We must wire and put him off at once.

SOREL. It's too late.

JUDITH. Well, we'll tell Clara to say we've been called away.

SOREL. That would be extremely rude, and, anyhow, I *want* to see him.

JUDITH. You mean to sit there in cold blood and tell me you've asked a complete stranger down for the week-end, and that you *want* to see him!

SOREL. I've often done it before.

JUDITH. I fail to see how that helps matters. Where's he going to sleep?

SOREL. The Japanese room.

JUDITH. [*Crosses with bunch of flowers to table below door right.*]

Oh, no, he isn't—Sandy Tyrell is sleeping there.

SIMON. [*Coming centre.*] There now! What did I tell you?

SOREL. Sandy—what?

JUDITH. Tyrell, dear.

SIMON. Why didn't you tell us, mother?

JUDITH. [*Starting to arrange flowers in vase.*] I did. I've talked of nothing but Sandy Tyrell for days—I adore Sandy Tyrell.

SIMON. [*Goes back to form and sits.*] You've never mentioned him.

SOREL. Who is he, mother?

JUDITH. He's a perfect darling, and madly in love with me—at least, it isn't me really, it's my Celebrated Actress glamour—but it gives me a divinely cosy feeling. I met him at Nora Trent's. [*Crosses to behind sofa table.*]

SOREL. Mother, I wish you'd give up this sort of thing.

JUDITH. [*Taking more flowers from basket.*] What exactly do you mean by 'this sort of thing,' Sorel?

SOREL. You know perfectly well what I mean.

JUDITH. [*Puts down flowers and goes to right corner of sofa.*] Are you attempting to criticize me?

SOREL. I should have thought you'd be above encouraging silly, callow young men who are infatuated by your name.

JUDITH. [*Goes back to table and picks up flowers.*] That may be true, but I shall allow nobody but myself to say it. I hoped you'd grow up a good *daughter* to me, not a critical *aunt*.

SOREL. [*Moves to left end of sofa.*] It's so terribly cheap.

JUDITH. Cheap! Nonsense! How about your diplomatist?

SOREL. Surely that 's a little different, dear?

JUDITH. If you mean that because you happen to be a vigorous *ingénue* of nineteen you have the complete monopoly of any amorous adventure there may be about, I feel it my firm duty to disillusion you.

SOREL. But, mother——

JUDITH. [*Crosses to top end of piano and picks up empty vase, which she gives Simon to hold while she fills it with flowers.*] Any one would think I was eighty, the way you go on. It was a great mistake not sending you to boarding schools, and you coming back and me being your elder sister.

SIMON. It wouldn't have been any use, darling. Every one knows we 're your son and daughter.

JUDITH. Only because I was stupid enough to dandle you about in front of cameras when you were little. I knew I should regret it.

SIMON. I don't see any point in trying to be younger than you are.

JUDITH. At your age, dear, it would be indecent if you did.

[*Having finished arranging flowers, she puts vase back on piano, and crosses to right corner of sofa.*]

SOREL. But, mother darling, don't you see it 's awfully undignified for you to go flaunting about with young men?

JUDITH. I don't flaunt about—I never have. I 've been morally an extremely nice woman all my life—more or less—and if dabbling gives me pleasure, I don't see why I *shouldn't* dabble.

SOREL. But it *oughtn't* to give you pleasure any *more*.

JUDITH. You know, Sorel, you grow more damnably feminine every day. I wish I 'd brought you up differently.

SOREL. I 'm proud of being feminine.

JUDITH. [*Sits on sofa beside Sorel—kissing her.*] You 're a darling, and I adore you; and you 're very pretty, and I 'm madly jealous of you.

SOREL. [*With her arms round her.*] Are you really? How lovely!

JUDITH. You will be nice to Sandy, won't you?

SOREL. [*Sits up.*] Can't he sleep in 'Little Hell'?

JUDITH. My dear, he 's frightfully athletic and all those hot-water pipes will sap his vitality.

SOREL. They 'll sap Richard's vitality too.

JUDITH. He won't notice them; he 's probably used to scorching tropical embassies with punkahs waving and everything.

SIMON. He 's sure to be deadly, anyhow.

SOREL. You're getting far too blasé and exclusive, Simon.

SIMON. Nothing of the sort. Only I loathe being hearty with your men friends.

SOREL. You've never been even civil to any of my friends, men or women.

JUDITH. Don't bicker.

SIMON. [*Rises and crosses to centre.*] Anyhow, the Japanese room's a woman's room, and a woman ought to have it.

JUDITH. I promised it to Sandy—he loves anything Japanese.

SIMON. So does Myra!

JUDITH. Myra!

SIMON. Myra Arundel. I've asked her down.

JUDITH. You've—what!

SIMON. I've asked Myra down for the week-end—she's awfully amusing.

SOREL. Well, all I can say is, it's beastly of you. You might have warned me. What on earth will Richard say?

SIMON. Something exquisitely non-committal, I expect.

JUDITH. This is too much! Do you mean to tell me, Simon—

SIMON. [*Goes to Judith—firmly.*] Yes, mother, I do. I've asked Myra down and I have a perfect right to. You've always brought us up to be free about things.

JUDITH. Myra Arundel is straining freedom to its *utmost* limits.

SIMON. Don't you like her?

JUDITH. No, dear, I detest her. She's far too old for you, and she goes about using sex as a sort of shrimping-net.

SIMON. Really, mother——!

JUDITH. It's no use being cross. You know perfectly well I dislike her, and that's why you never told me she was coming until too late to stop her. It's intolerable of you.

SOREL. [*Grandly.*] Whether she's here or not is a matter of extreme indifference to *me*, but I'm afraid Richard won't like her very much.

SIMON. You are afraid he'll like her *too* much!

SOREL. That was an offensive remark, Simon, and rather silly.

JUDITH. [*Plaintively.*] Why on earth don't you fall in love with nice young girls, instead of self-conscious vampires?

SIMON. She's not a vampire, and I never said I was in love with her.

SOREL. He's crazy about her. She butters him up and admires his sketches.

SIMON. [*Leaning across Judith and shouting at Sorel.*] What about you picking up old gentlemen at dances?



SOREL. [*Furiously—shouting back at him.*] He's not old!

JUDITH. [*Stretches her arms up and parts them; Simon goes centre.*] You've both upset me thoroughly. I wanted a nice restful week-end, with moments of Sandy's ingenuous affection to warm the cockles of my heart when I felt in the mood, and now the house is going to be full of discord—not enough food, every one fighting for the bath—perfect agony! I wish I were dead!

SIMON. You needn't worry about Myra and me. We shall keep out of every one's way.

SOREL. I shall take Richard on the river all day to-morrow.

JUDITH. In what?

SOREL. The punt.

JUDITH. I absolutely forbid you to go near the punt.

SIMON. It's sure to rain, anyhow.

JUDITH. What your father will say I tremble to think. He needs complete quiet to finish off *The Sinful Woman*.

SOREL. I see no reason for there to be any noise, unless Sandy What's-his-name is given to shouting.

JUDITH. If you're rude to Sandy I shall be extremely angry.

[*Simon and Sorel bend over Judith and all talk loudly at once.*]

SOREL.	} [ <i>Together.</i> ]	{	Now, look here, mother——
SIMON.			Why you should expect——
JUDITH.			He's coming all the way down specially to be nice to me——

*Enter David down stairs. He looks slightly irritable.*

DAVID. [*Coming down to centre.*] Why are you all making such a noise? [*Simon crosses to piano and picks up book.*]

JUDITH. I think I'm going mad!

DAVID. Why hasn't Clara brought me my tea?

JUDITH. I don't know.

DAVID. Where is Clara?

JUDITH. Do stop firing questions at me, David.

DAVID. Why are you all so irritable? What's happened?

*Enter Clara from below stairs, with a tray of tea for one, and thrusts it into David's hands.*

CLARA. Here's your tea. I'm sorry I'm late with it. Amy forgot to put the kettle on—she's got terrible toothache.

DAVID. Poor girl! Give her some oil of cloves.

SOREL. If any one else mentions oil of cloves, I shall do something desperate! *[Rises and moves a step left.]*

DAVID. It's wonderful stuff. Where's Zoe?

SIMON. She was in the garden this morning.

DAVID. I suppose no one thought of giving her any lunch?

CLARA. I put it down by the kitchen table as usual, but she never came in for it.

SOREL. She's probably mousing.

DAVID. She isn't old enough yet. She might have fallen into the river, for all you care. I think it's a shame!

CLARA. Don't you worry your head—Zoe won't come to any harm; she's too wily. *[Exit door below stairs.]*

DAVID. I don't want to be disturbed. *[He takes his tray and goes upstairs; then he turns.]* Listen, Simon. There's a perfectly sweet flapper coming down by the four-thirty. Will you go and meet her and be nice to her? She's an abject fool, but a useful type, and I want to study her a little in domestic surroundings. She can sleep in the Japanese room.

*[He goes off, leaving behind him a deathly silence. Sorel drops into chair down left.]*

JUDITH. *[Pause.]* I should like someone to play something very beautiful to me on the piano.

SIMON. *[Stamps up to french window, centre.]* Damn everything! Damn! Damn! Damn!

SOREL. Swearing doesn't help.

SIMON. It helps me a lot.

SOREL. What does father mean by going on like that?

JUDITH. In view of the imminent reception, you'd better go and shave, Simon. *[Simon comes down and leans on piano.]*

SOREL. *[Rising and bursting into tears of rage.]* It's perfectly beastly! Whenever I make any sort of plan about anything, it's always done in by someone. I wish I were earning my own living somewhere—a free agent—able to do whatever I liked without being cluttered up and frustrated by the family——

JUDITH. *[Picturesquely.]* It grieves me to hear you say that, Sorel.

SOREL. Don't be infuriating, mother!

JUDITH. *[Sadly.]* A change has come over my children of late. I have tried to shut my eyes to it, but in vain. At my time of life one must face bitter facts!

SIMON. This is going to be the blackest Saturday-till-Monday we've ever spent!

JUDITH. [*Tenderly.*] Sorel, you mustn't cry.

SOREL. Don't sympathize with me; it's only temper.

JUDITH. [*Pulling her down on to sofa beside her.*] Put your head on my shoulder, dear.

SIMON. [*Bitterly.*] Your head, like the golden fleece . . .

SOREL. [*Tearfully.*] Richard'll have to have 'Little Hell' and that horrible flapper the Japanese room.

JUDITH. Over my dead body!

SIMON. [*Comes over to his mother.*] Mother, what are we to do?

JUDITH. [*Pulls him down on his knees and places his head on her right shoulder. Sorel's head on her left. Makes a charming little motherly picture.*] We must all be very, very kind to every one!

SIMON. Now then, mother, none of that!

JUDITH. [*Aggrieved.*] I don't know what you mean, Simon.

SIMON. You were being beautiful and sad.

JUDITH. But I am beautiful and sad.

SIMON. You're not particularly beautiful, darling, and you never were.

JUDITH. Never mind: I made thousands think I was.

SIMON. And as for being sad——

JUDITH. [*Pushes Simon on the floor.*] Now, Simon, I will not be dictated to like this! If I say I'm sad, I *am* sad. You don't understand, because you're precocious and tiresome. . . . There comes a time in all women's lives——

SOREL. [*Rises and stands at left corner of sofa.*] Oh, dear!  
[*With pained expression.*]

JUDITH. What did you say, Sorel?

SOREL. I said, 'Oh, dear!'

JUDITH. Well, please don't say it again, because it annoys me.

SOREL. [*Smiling.*] You're such a lovely hypocrite!

JUDITH. [*Casting up her eyes.*] I don't know what I've done to be cursed with such ungrateful children! It's very cruel at my time of life——

SIMON. There you go again!

JUDITH. [*Pause—inconsequently.*] You're getting far too tall, Sorel.

SOREL. Sorry, mother!

JUDITH. Give me another of those disgusting cigarettes—[*Simon rises and goes to piano—quickly takes cigarette.*] I don't know where they came from. [Rises and goes centre.

SIMON. [*Moves centre and gives Judith cigarette.*] Here!  
[He lights it for her.]



JUDITH. I'm going to forget entirely about all these dreadful people arriving. My mind henceforward shall be a blank on the subject.

SOREL. It's all very fine, mother, but——

JUDITH. I made a great decision this morning.

SIMON. What kind of decision?

JUDITH. It's a secret.

SOREL. Aren't you going to tell us?

JUDITH. Of course. I meant it was a secret from your father.

SIMON. What is it?

*[Judith goes up centre and looks off left to make sure no one is listening, then returns to centre.]*

JUDITH. I'm going back to the stage.

SIMON. I knew it!

*[Drops on to form below piano.]*

JUDITH. I'm stagnating here. I won't stagnate as long as there's breath left in my body.

SOREL. Do you think it's wise? You retired so very finally last year. What excuse will you give for returning so soon?

JUDITH. My public, dear—letters from my public!

SIMON. Have you had any?

JUDITH. One or two. That's what decided me, really—I ought to have had hundreds.

SOREL. *[Kneels on right corner of sofa.]* We'll write some lovely ones, and you can publish them in the papers.

JUDITH. Of course.

SOREL. You will be dignified about it all, won't you, darling?

JUDITH. I'm much more dignified on the stage than in the country—it's my *milieu*. I've tried terribly hard to be 'landed gentry,' but without any real success. *[Moves up centre with outstretched arms.]* I long for excitement and glamour. *[Comes down to right corner of sofa.]* Think of the thrill of a first night; all those ardent playgoers willing one to succeed; the critics all leaning forward with glowing faces, receptive and exultant—emitting queer little inarticulate noises as some witty line tickles their fancy. The satisfied grunt of the *Daily Mail*, the abandoned gurgle of the *Sunday Times*, and the shrill, enthusiastic scream of the *Daily Express*! I can distinguish them all——

SIMON. Have you got a play?

JUDITH. I think I shall revive *Love's Whirlwind*.

SOREL. *[Collapsing on to sofa.]* Oh, mother!

*[She gurgles with laughter.]*

SIMON. *[Weakly.]* Father will be furious.

JUDITH. I can't help that.

SOREL. It's such a fearful play.

JUDITH. It's a marvellous part. [*Sorel opens her mouth to speak.*]  
You mustn't say too much against it, Sorel. I'm willing to laugh at it a little myself, but, after all, it *was* one of my greatest successes.

SIMON. Oh, it's appalling—but I love it. It makes me laugh.

JUDITH. The public love it too, and it doesn't make them laugh—much. [*Moves to centre and very dramatically she recites.*]  
'You are a fool, a blind pitiable fool. You think because you have bought my body that you have bought my soul!' [*Turning to Simon.*] You must say that's dramatic.—'I've dreamed of love like this, but I never realized, I never knew how beautiful it could be in reality!' [*Wipes away imaginary tears.*] That line always brought a tear to my eye.

SIMON. The second act *is* the best, there's no doubt about that.

JUDITH. [*Turning to Sorel.*] From the moment Victor comes in it's strong—tremendously strong. . . . Be Victor a minute, Sorel——

SOREL. [*Rising.*] Do you mean when he comes in at the end of the act?

JUDITH. Yes. You know—'Is this a game?'

SOREL. [*Going to Judith and speaking in a very dramatic voice.*]  
'Is this a game?'

JUDITH. [*With spirit.*] 'Yes—and a game that must be played to the finish.'

SIMON. [*Rising and moving to Judith, and speaking in deep dramatic voice.*] 'Zara, what does this mean?'

JUDITH. 'So many illusions shattered—so many dreams trodden in the dust!'

SOREL. [*Runs behind Judith and in front of Simon to down right.*] I'm George now—I don't understand! You and Victor—My God! [*Strikes dramatic pose.*]

JUDITH. [*Moving a little to left—listening.*] 'Sssh! Isn't that little Pam crying?'

SIMON. [*Savagely.*] 'She'll cry more, poor mite, when she realizes her mother is a——'

[*The front-door bell rings.*]

JUDITH. Damn! There's the bell!

SOREL. [*Rushing to the glass—on piano.*] I look hideous!

SIMON. [*Moves to right side of piano.*] Yes, dear!

[*Clara enters from door below stairs and crosses to door right.*]

JUDITH. Clara—before you open the door—we shall be eight for dinner.

CLARA. [*Comes to right centre.*] My God!

SIMON. And for breakfast, lunch, tea, and dinner to-morrow.

JUDITH. [*Vaguely.*] Will you get various rooms ready?

CLARA. I shall have to—they can't sleep in the passage!

SOREL. Now we've upset Clara!

JUDITH. It can't be helped—nothing can be helped. It's Fate—everything that happens is Fate. That's always a great comfort to me.

CLARA. More like arrant selfishness!

JUDITH. You mustn't be pert, Clara.

CLARA. Pert I may be, but I've got some thought for others. Eight for dinner—Amy going home early! It's nothing more nor less than an imposition!

*[The bell rings again.]*

SIMON. Hadn't you better let them all in?

*[Clara goes to the front door and admits Sandy Tyrell, who is a fresh-looking young man; he has an unspoilt, youthful sense of humour and rather big hands, owing to a misplaced enthusiasm for amateur boxing. Clara goes out, door below stairs.]*

SANDY. [*Crossing to Judith and shaking hands.*] I say, it's perfectly ripping of you to let me come down.

JUDITH. Are you alone?

SANDY. [*Surprised.*] Yes.

JUDITH. I mean, didn't you meet any one at the station?

SANDY. I motored down; my car's outside. Would you like me to meet anybody?

JUDITH. Oh, no, I must introduce you. This is my daughter Sorel, and my son Simon.

SANDY. [*Moves to Sorel and offers his hand, which she ignores.*] How do you do?

SOREL. [*Coldly.*] I'm extremely well, thank you, and I hope you are. *[Brushes past him and exits upstairs.]*

SIMON. So do I. *[Does the same. Sandy looks shattered.]*

JUDITH. [*Crosses in front of Sandy and glares after Simon and Sorel.*] You must forgive me for having rather peculiar children. Have you got a bag or anything?

SANDY. Yes; it's in the car.

JUDITH. We'd better leave it there for the moment, as Clara has to get the tea. We'll find you a room afterwards.

SANDY. I've been looking forward to this most awfully.



JUDITH. It is nice, isn't it? [*Moves to window.*] You can see as far as Marlow on a clear day, so they tell me.

SANDY. [*Goes up to her.*] I meant I've been looking forward to seeing you.

JUDITH. How perfectly sweet of you! [*Crosses to sofa and sits left corner.*] Would you like a drink?

SANDY. No, thanks. I'm in training.

JUDITH. [*Motioning him to sit beside her.*] How lovely! What for?

SANDY. I'm boxing again in a couple of weeks.

JUDITH. I must come to your first night.

SANDY. [*Sits on sofa.*] You look simply splendid.

JUDITH. I'm so glad. You know, you mustn't mind if Simon and Sorel insult you a little—they've been very bad-tempered lately.

SANDY. It's awfully funny you have a grown-up son and daughter at all. I can hardly believe it.

JUDITH. [*Quickly.*] I was married very young.

SANDY. I don't wonder. You know, it's frightfully queer the way I've been planning to know you for ages, and I never did until last week.

JUDITH. I liked you from the first, really, because you're such a nice shape.

SANDY. [*Slightly embarrassed.*] Oh, I see. . . .

JUDITH. Small hips and lovely broad shoulders—I wish Simon had smaller hips. [*Slight pause.*] Do you think you could teach him to box?

SANDY. Rather—if he likes!

JUDITH. That's just the trouble—I'm afraid he won't like. He's so dreadfully un—that sort of thing. You must use your influence subtly. I'm sure David would be pleased.

SANDY. Who's David?

JUDITH. My husband.

SANDY. [*Surprised.*] Oh!

JUDITH. Why do you say 'Oh' like that? Didn't you know I had a husband?

SANDY. I thought he was dead.

JUDITH. No, he's not dead; he's upstairs. [*Pointing to stairs.*

SANDY. You're quite different from what you were the other day.

JUDITH. It's this garden hat. I'll take it off. [*She does so and puts it on table behind sofa.*] There! I've been pruning the calceolarias.

SANDY. [*Puzzled.*] Oh?—

JUDITH. I love my garden, you know—it's so peaceful and quaint. I spend long days dreaming away in it—you know how one dreams.

SANDY. Oh, yes.

JUDITH. [*Warming up.*] I always longed to leave the brittle glamour of cities and theatres and find rest in some old-world nook. That's why we came to Cookham.

SANDY. Awfully nice place, Cookham.

JUDITH. [*Slight pause.*] Have you ever seen me on the stage?

SANDY. Rather!

JUDITH. Oh, what in?

SANDY. That thing when you pretended to cheat at cards to save your husband's good name.

JUDITH. Oh, *The Bold Deceiver*. That play was never quite right.

SANDY. You were absolutely wonderful. That was when I first fell in love with you.

JUDITH. [*Delighted.*] Was it, really?

SANDY. Yes; you were so frightfully pathetic and brave.

JUDITH. [*Basking.*] Was I?

SANDY. Rather!

[*There is a pause.*]

JUDITH. Well, go on. . . .

SANDY. [*Flustered.*] I feel such a fool, telling you what I think, as though it mattered.

JUDITH. Of course it matters—to me, anyhow.

SANDY. Does it—honestly?

JUDITH. Certainly.

SANDY. It seems too good to be true—sitting here and talking as though we were old friends.

JUDITH. We *are* old friends—we probably met in another life. Reincarnation, you know—fascinating!

SANDY. You do say ripping things.

JUDITH. Do I? Give me a cigarette. [*He takes cigarette from box on table and gives it to her.*] And let's put our feet up. [*She puts her feet up behind Sandy, and he lights her cigarette.*]

SANDY. All right.

[*They settle themselves comfortably at opposite ends of the sofa, smoking.*]

JUDITH. Can you punt?

SANDY. Yes—a bit.

JUDITH. You must teach Simon—he always gets the pole stuck.

SANDY. I'd rather teach you.

JUDITH. You're so gallant and chivalrous—much more like an American than an Englishman.

SANDY. I should like to go on saying nice things to you for ever.

JUDITH. [*Giving him her hand.*] Sandy! [*There comes a loud ring at the bell.*] There now! [*Takes her feet off sofa.*]

SANDY. Is any one else coming to stay?

JUDITH. Any one else! You don't know—you just don't know.

*Clara enters and crosses over to door right, opens it and lets it fall back in Myra's face, then exits, left.*

SANDY. You said it would be quite quiet, with nobody at all.

JUDITH. I was wrong. It's going to be very noisy, with herds of angry people stamping about. Give me my hat.

*[He gives her her hat, which she puts on.]*

*Myra pushes open door, and puts her suitcase and tennis racket just outside door, and enters, coming to centre and holding out her hand to Judith. Sandy rises.*

MYRA. [*Advancing.*] Judith—my dear—this is divine!

JUDITH. [*Rises and meets Myra, centre—emptily.*] Too, too lovely! Where are the others?

MYRA. What others?

JUDITH. Did you come by the four-thirty?

MYRA. Yes.

JUDITH. Didn't you see any one at the station?

MYRA. Yes, several people, but I didn't know they were coming here.

JUDITH. Well, they are.

MYRA. Sorel said it was going to be just ourselves this weekend.

JUDITH. [*Sharply.*] Sorel?

MYRA. Yes—didn't she tell you she'd asked me? Weren't you expecting me?

JUDITH. Simon muttered something about your coming, but Sorel didn't mention it. [*Looks at Myra and gives a chuckle.*] Wasn't that odd of her? [*Crosses to piano.*]

MYRA. You're a divinely mad family! [*To Sandy.*] How do you do? It's useless to wait for introductions, with the Blisses. My name's Myra Arundel.

JUDITH. [*Airily.*] Sandy Tyrell, Myra Arundel; Myra Arundel, Sandy Tyrell. There!

MYRA. Is that your car outside?

SANDY. Yes.



MYRA. [*Moving to Judith again.*] Well, Judith, I *do* think you might have told me someone was motoring down. A nice car would have been so much more comfortable than that beastly train.

JUDITH. I never knew you were coming until a little while ago.

MYRA. It's heavenly here—after London! The heat was terrible when I left. You look awfully well, Judith. Rusticating obviously agrees with you.

JUDITH. I'm glad you think so. Personally, I feel that a nervous breakdown is imminent.

MYRA. My dear, how ghastly! What's the matter?

JUDITH. Nothing's the matter yet, Myra, but I have presentiments. [*Crosses in front of Myra and takes Sandy's hand. She begins to go upstairs, followed by Sandy. Then she turns.*] Come upstairs, Sandy, and I'll show you your room. I'll send Simon down to you. He's shaving, I think, but you won't mind that, will you?

[*She goes off. Myra makes a slight grimace after her, then she helps herself to a cigarette and wanders to piano. Simon comes downstairs very fast, putting on his coat. He has apparently finished his toilet.*

SIMON. [*Runs over to Myra.*] Myra, this is marvellous!

[*He tries to kiss her.*

MYRA. [*Pushing him away.*] No, Simon, dear; it's too hot.

SIMON. You look beautifully cool.

MYRA. I'm more than cool, really, but it's not climatic coolness. I've been mentally chilled to the marrow by Judith's attitude.

SIMON. Why, what did she say?

MYRA. Nothing very much. She was bouncing about on the sofa with a hearty young thing in flannels, and seemed to resent my appearance rather.

SIMON. You mustn't take any notice of mother.

MYRA. I'll try not to, but it's difficult.

SIMON. She adores you, really.

MYRA. I'm sure she does.

SIMON. She's annoyed to-day because father and Sorel have been asking people down without telling her.

MYRA. Poor dear! I quite see why.

SIMON. You look enchanting!

MYRA. Thank you, Simon.

SIMON. Are you pleased to see me?

MYRA. Of course. That's why I came.

SIMON. [*Shouts.*] Darling!

MYRA. Sssh! Don't shout.

SIMON. [*Moving away to centre.*] I feel most colossally temperamental—I should like to kiss you and kiss you and break everything in the house and then jump into the river.

MYRA. Dear Simon!

SIMON. [*He takes her hand and studies her.*] You're everything I want you to be—absolutely everything! Marvellous clothes, marvellous looks, marvellous brain—oh, God, it's terrible!

[*Drops her hand and moves left.*]

MYRA. I dined with Charlie Templeton last night.

SIMON. Well, you're a devil! You only did it to annoy me. He's far too plump, and he can't do anything but dither about the embassy in badly-cut trousers. You loathe him really; you know you do—you're too intelligent not to. You couldn't like him and me at the same time—it's impossible!

MYRA. Don't be so conceited.

SIMON. [*Running to her and clasping her in his arms.*] Darling. I adore you!

MYRA. That's right.

SIMON. [*Releasing her.*] But you're callous—that's what it is, callous! You don't care a damn. You don't love me a bit, do you?

MYRA. Love's a very big word, Simon.

SIMON. It isn't—it's tiny. What are we to do?

MYRA. What do you mean?

SIMON. We can't go on like this.

MYRA. I'm not going on like anything.

[*Crosses over and sits in chair down left.*]

SIMON. Yes, you are; you're going on like Medusa, and there are awful snakes popping their heads out at me from under your hat—I shall be turned to stone in a minute, and then you'll be sorry.

MYRA. [*Laughing.*] You're very sweet, and I'm very fond of you.

SIMON. [*Crosses over to her and takes her hand.*] Tell me what you've been doing—everything.

MYRA. Nothing.

SIMON. What did you do after you'd dined with Charlie Templeton?

MYRA. Supped with Charlie Templeton.

SIMON. Well! [*Throws her hand down and goes to right corner of sofa and sits on arm.*] I don't mind a bit. I hope you ate a lot and enjoyed yourself—there!

MYRA. Generous boy! Come and kiss me.

SIMON. You're only playing up to me now; you don't really want to a bit.

MYRA. I'm aching for it.

SIMON. [*Runs to her and kisses her violently.*] I love you!

MYRA. This week-end's going to be strenuous.

SIMON. [*Moves away to centre.*] Hell upon earth—fifteen million people in the house. We'll get up at seven and rush away down the river.

MYRA. No, we won't.

SIMON. Well, don't let either of us agree to anything we say—we'll both be difficult. [*Flings himself on sofa with his feet up on left end.*] I love being difficult.

MYRA. You certainly do.

SIMON. But I'm in the most lovely mood now. Just seeing you makes me feel grand——

MYRA. Is your father here?

SIMON. Yes; he's working on a new novel.

MYRA. He writes brilliantly.

SIMON. Doesn't he? He drinks too much tea, though.

MYRA. It can't do him much harm, surely?

SIMON. It tans the stomach.

MYRA. Who is Sandy Tyrell?

SIMON. Never heard of him.

MYRA. He's here, with Judith.

SIMON. Oh, *that* poor thing with hot hands! We'll ignore him.

MYRA. I thought he looked rather nice.

SIMON. You must be mad! He looked disgusting.

MYRA. [*Laughing.*] Idiot!

SIMON. Smooth my hair with your soft white hands.

MYRA. [*Rises and goes to right end of sofa—ruffling it.*] It's got glue on it.

SIMON. [*Catching her hand and kissing it.*] You smell heavenly! What is it?

MYRA. Borgia of Rosine.

SIMON. How appropriate!

[*He tries to pull her down and kiss her.*]

MYRA. [*Breaking away.*] You're too demonstrative to-day,  
Simon. [*The front door rings.*]

SIMON. Damn, damn! It's those drearies.

[*Takes his feet off sofa.*]

*Clara enters, crosses to door right, opens it and lets it fall back*



*in Richard's face, and starts to return to door left, but stops as he speaks. Richard Greatham and Jackie Coryton come in. There is, by this time, a good deal of luggage on the step. Richard is iron-grey and tall; Jackie is small and shingled, with an ingenuous manner which will lose its charm as she grows older.*

RICHARD. Is this Mrs Bliss's house?

CLARA. [*Off-hand.*] Oh, yes, this is it.

RICHARD. Is Miss Sorel Bliss in?

CLARA. I expect so. I'll see if I can find her.

*[She goes upstairs. Richard closes door. Jackie goes down right.]*

SIMON. [*Rises and crosses to Richard, carelessly shakes hands, then turns back to Myra, ignoring Richard.*] Hallo! Did you have a nice journey?

RICHARD. Yes thank you, very nice. I met Miss Coryton at the station. We introduced ourselves while we were waiting for the only taxi to come back.

MYRA. [*Taking a step down left centre.*] Oh, I took the only taxi. How maddening of me!

RICHARD. [*Crosses to her and shakes hands.*] Mrs Arundel! How do you do? I never recognized you.

*[Simon goes behind Richard to right centre and stares at Jackie rudely.]*

JACKIE. I did.

MYRA. Why? Have we met anywhere?

JACKIE. No; I mean I recognized you as the one who took the taxi.

RICHARD. [*To Simon.*] You are Sorel's brother?

SIMON. Yes; she'll be down in a minute. Come out into the garden, Myra——

MYRA. But, Simon, we can't. . . .

SIMON. [*Reaching across Richard, grabbing her hand and dragging her off through window.*] Yes, we can. I shall go mad if I stay in the house a moment longer. [*Over his shoulder to Richard and Jackie.*] Tea will be here soon.

*[He and Myra go off into garden, right. There's a slight pause.]*

JACKIE. Well!

RICHARD. A strange young man!

*[Moving up to window, looking after them.]*

JACKIE. Very rude, I think.

RICHARD. [*Turning back into the room.*] Have you ever met him before?

JACKIE. No; I don't know any of them except Mr Bliss—he's a wonderful person.

RICHARD. [*Puts his coat and hat on chair up left centre.*] I wonder if he knows you're here.

JACKIE. Perhaps that funny woman who opened the door will tell him.

RICHARD. Yes, allow me. [*Takes her coat and puts it on chair with his.*] It was fortunate that we met at the station.

JACKIE. I'm frightfully glad. I should have been terrified arriving all by myself.

RICHARD. [*Looks out of window again. Slight pause.*] I do hope the weather will keep good over Sunday—the country round here is delightful.

JACKIE. Yes. [*Another pause.*]

RICHARD. There's nowhere like England in the spring and summer.

JACKIE. No, there isn't, is there? [*Another pause.*]

RICHARD. There's a sort of *quality* you find in no other countries.

[*Another pause, in which Jackie moves over to sofa and sits.*]

JACKIE. Have you travelled a lot?

RICHARD. [*Modestly.*] A good deal.

JACKIE. How lovely!

[*Richard comes down and sits on form below piano. There is a pause.*]

RICHARD. Spain is very beautiful.

JACKIE. Yes, I've always heard Spain was awfully nice.

[*Pause.*]

RICHARD. Except for the bull-fights. No one who ever really loved horses could enjoy a bull-fight.

JACKIE. Nor any one who loved bulls either.

RICHARD. Exactly.

[*Pause.*]

JACKIE. Italy's awfully nice, isn't it?

RICHARD. Oh, yes, charming.

JACKIE. I've always wanted to go to Italy.

[*Pause.*]

RICHARD. Rome is a beautiful city.

JACKIE. Yes, I've always heard Rome was lovely.

RICHARD. And Naples and Capri—Capri's enchanting.

JACKIE. It must be.

[*Pause.*]

RICHARD. Have you ever been abroad at all?

JACKIE. Oh, yes; I went to Dieppe once—we had a house there for the summer.

RICHARD. [*Kindly.*] Dear little place, Dieppe.

JACKIE. Yes, it was lovely.

[*Judith comes down stairs, followed by Sandy, with his arms full of cushions. Sits down on form and puts on her goloshes beside Richard, who rises. Then exits into garden without looking at Richard or Jackie. Sandy picks up cushions and her gloves from table and goes out after her.*]

JACKIE. Well!

[*Pause, and sitting again.*]

RICHARD. *Russia* used to be a wonderful country before the war.

JACKIE. It must have been. . . . Was that her?

RICHARD. Who?

JACKIE. Judith Bliss.

RICHARD. Yes, I expect it was.

JACKIE. [*Nearly crying.*] I wish I 'd never come.

RICHARD. You mustn't worry. They're a very Bohemian family, I believe.

JACKIE. I wonder if Mr Bliss knows I'm here.

RICHARD. I wonder.

JACKIE. Couldn't we ring a bell, or anything?

RICHARD. Yes, perhaps we'd better.

[*Rises and crosses to door down left. He finds bell and presses it.*]

JACKIE. I don't suppose it rings.

RICHARD. [*Comes to left corner of sofa.*] You mustn't be depressed.

JACKIE. I feel horrid.

RICHARD. It's always a little embarrassing coming to a strange house for the first time. You'll like Sorel—she's charming.

JACKIE. [*Desperately.*] I wonder where she is.

RICHARD. [*Consoling.*] I expect tea will be here soon.

JACKIE. Do you think they *have* tea?

RICHARD. [*Alarmed.*] Oh, yes—they must.

JACKIE. Oh, well, we'd better go on waiting, then.

RICHARD. [*Takes cigarette-case out of his pocket.*] Do you mind if I smoke?

JACKIE. Not a bit.

RICHARD. Will you?

JACKIE. No, thank you.

RICHARD. [*Sitting down on left end of sofa.*] I got this case in Japan. It's pretty isn't it?

JACKIE. [*Takes case, turns it over and hands it back.*] Awfully pretty.

[*They lapse into hopeless silence.*]



*Enter Sorel down stairs—comes to left centre.*

SOREL. Oh, Richard, I'm dreadfully sorry! I didn't know you were here. *[They shake hands.]*

RICHARD. We've been here a good while.

SOREL. How awful! Please forgive me. I was upstairs.

*[Jackie bobs up under their hands and stands in front of Richard.]*

RICHARD. This is Miss Coryton.

SOREL. Oh!

JACKIE. How do you do?

SOREL. Have you come to see father?

*[Richard lights his cigarette.]*

JACKIE. Yes.

SOREL. He's in his study. *[Moves away to centre.]* You'd better go up.

JACKIE. *[Looks hopelessly at Richard, then goes to Sorel and clutches her arm.]* I don't know the way.

SOREL. *[Irritably.]* Oh, well—I'll take you. Come on! Wait a minute, Richard. *[She takes her to the bottom of the stairs.]*

It's along that passage and the third door on the right.

JACKIE. Oh, thank you. *[She goes upstairs despondently.]*

SOREL. *[Coming down again—to Richard.]* The poor girl looks half-witted.

RICHARD. She's shy, I think.

SOREL. I hope father will find her a comfort.

*[Sits on right end of sofa.]*

RICHARD. Tell me one thing, Sorel, did your father and mother know I was coming! *[Sits beside her.]*

SOREL. Oh, yes; they were awfully pleased.

RICHARD. A rather nice-looking woman came down, in a big hat, and went into the garden with a young man, without saying a word.

SOREL. That was mother, I expect. We're an independent family—we entertain our friends sort of separately.

RICHARD. Oh, I see.

*[Slight pause.]*

SOREL. It was sweet of you to come.

RICHARD. I wanted to come—I've thought about you a lot.

SOREL. Have you really? That's thrilling!

RICHARD. I mean it. You're so alive and vital and different from other people.

SOREL. I'm so frightened that you'll be bored here.

RICHARD. Bored! Why should I be?

SOREL. Oh, I don't know. But you won't be, will you?—or if you are, tell me at once, and we'll do something quite different.

RICHARD. You're rather a dear, you know.

SOREL. I'm not. [*Rises and goes centre.*] I'm devastating, entirely lacking in restraint. So's Simon. It's father's and mother's fault, really; you see, they're so vague—they've spent their lives cultivating their arts and not devoting any time to ordinary conventions and manners and things. I'm the only one who sees that, so I'm trying to be better. I'd love to be beautifully poised and carry off difficult situations with a lift of the eyebrows——

RICHARD. I'm sure you could carry off anything.

SOREL. [*Moves to right corner of sofa.*] There you are, you see, saying the right thing! You *always* say the right thing, and no one knows a bit what you're really thinking. That's what I adore.

RICHARD. I'm afraid to say anything now, in case you think I'm only being correct.

SOREL. But you are correct. I wish you'd teach Simon to be correct too. [*Sits beside Richard again.*]

RICHARD. It would be uphill work, I'm afraid.

SOREL. Why, don't you like him?

RICHARD. I've only met him for a moment.

[*There is an uncomfortable pause.*]

SOREL. Would you like to see the garden?

RICHARD. [*He half rises.*] Very much indeed.

SOREL. No, as a matter of fact—[*Richard sits again*—we'd better wait until after tea. [*Another pause.*] Shall I sing you something?

RICHARD. Please—I should love it.

[*They both rise. Sorel goes reluctantly to piano.*]

SOREL. [*Comes slowly to sofa.*] I don't want to really a bit—only I'm trying to entertain you. It's as easy as pie to talk in someone else's house, like at the dance the other night, but here on my own *ground* I'm finding it difficult.

RICHARD. [*Puzzled.*] I'm sorry.

SOREL. Oh, it isn't your fault; honestly, it isn't—you're awfully kind and responsive. [*Sits on sofa.*] What shall we do?

RICHARD. I'm quite happy talking—[*sits beside her*—to you. [*Pause.*]

SOREL. Can you play Mah-Jong?

RICHARD. No, I'm afraid I can't.

SOREL. I'm so glad—I *do* hate it so. [*Clara enters, with a small*

*stool for tea, and places it with a bang at Richard's feet. Here's tea!*

CLARA. Where's your mother, dear?

SOREL. Out in the garden, I think.

CLARA. It's starting to rain.

*[Goes out left and fetches tea-tray loaded with tea-things, which she puts on stool.]*

SOREL. Oh, every one will come dashing in, then. How awful!

RICHARD. *[Rises and goes centre.]* Won't the luggage get rather wet out there?

SOREL. What luggage?

CLARA. I'll bring it in when I've made the tea.

RICHARD. *[Goes out right and returns with two suitcases, which he places down right centre.]* Oh, don't trouble; I'll do it now.

SOREL. We ought to have got William up from the village.

CLARA. It's Saturday.

SOREL. I know it is.

CLARA. He's playing cricket. *[Sorel rushes to help Richard.]*

SOREL. Do sit down and smoke. I can easily manage it.

RICHARD. Certainly not.

SOREL. *[Goes out.]* How typical of Myra to have so many bags! . . . Ooh! *[She staggers with a suitcase. Richard goes to her assistance, and they both drop it.]* There now—we've probably broken something!

RICHARD. Well, it's not my bag, so it doesn't matter. *[He goes out to get the last case while Sorel holds the door open.]* This is the last one. . . .

*[He brings in a dressing-case, and wipes his hand on his handkerchief.]*

SOREL. Do you know where to wash if you want to?

RICHARD. No—but I'm all right.

*[They both stand leaning on piano, talking.]*

*Re-enter Clara with teapot. She puts it on stool and exits again. Simon and Myra come in from the garden.*

MYRA. *[Goes to shake hands with Sorel, but Simon pulls her towards sofa.]* Hallo, Sorel! How are you?

SOREL. I'm splendid. Do you know Mr Greatham?

MYRA. Oh, yes; we've met several times.

SIMON. Come and sit down, Myra.

*[Myra, pulled by Simon sits left side of sofa, Simon right side.]*



*David and Jackie come down stairs, David leading her by the elbow like a small child. They come centre.*

DAVID. Is tea ready?

SOREL. Yes; just.

DAVID. [*Leaving Jackie right centre and crossing to Simon.*] Simon, come and be nice to Miss Coryton.

SIMON. We've met already.

DAVID. [*Drags him out of his seat, and sits there himself.*] That's no reason for you not to be nice to her.

MYRA. [*Firmly.*] How do you do?

DAVID. How do you do? Are you staying here?

MYRA. I hope so.

*[Simon moves round to behind left corner of sofa and sits on table.]*

DAVID. You must forgive me for being rather frowsy, but I've been working hard.

SOREL. Father, this is Mr Greatham.

*[Richard takes a step down right.]*

DAVID. How are you? When did you arrive?

RICHARD. This afternoon.

DAVID. Good. Have some tea. [*He begins to pour it out.*] Every one had better put their own sugar and milk in, or we shall get muddled. Where's your mother, Simon?

SIMON. [*Moves round and takes a cup of tea and a piece of cake, then returns to his seat.*] She was last seen in the punt.

DAVID. How extraordinary! She can't punt.

SOREL. Sandy Tyrell's with her.

DAVID. Oh, well, she'll be all right, then. [*A slight pause.*] Who is he?

SOREL. I don't know.

DAVID. Do sit down, everybody. [*Jackie sits on form below piano.*]

*Enter Judith and Sandy from the garden. She comes to centre and kicks off goloshes.*

JUDITH. There's going to be a thunderstorm. I felt sick this morning. This is Sandy Tyrell—everybody—

SOREL. Mother, I want you to meet Mr Greatham.

*[Richard goes to her and shakes hands, then returns to piano.]*

JUDITH. Oh, yes. You were here before, weren't you?

SOREL. Before *what*, darling?

*[Sorel crosses and gets a cup of tea and returns with it to settle down right.]*

JUDITH. Before I went out in the punt. There was somebody else here, too—a fair girl. *[She sees Jackie.]* Oh, there you are! How do you do? Sit down, Sandy, and eat anything you want. Give Sandy some bread-and-butter, Simon.

*[Judith crosses left and helps herself to tea, then sits in chair down left. Richard and Jackie sit on form below piano. Sandy remains standing centre.]*

SIMON. *[Rises, picks up plate of bread-and-butter, crosses to Sandy and ungraciously thrusts it into his hands, then returns to his seat.]* Here you are!

SANDY. Thanks.

*[There is a long pause; then Myra and Richard speak together.]*

RICHARD.	{	<i>[Together.]</i>	{	How far are you from Maidenhead,
MYRA.				exactly?
				What a pity it's raining—we might
				have had some tennis——

*[Then both stop, to let the other go on. There is another terrible silence.]*

MYRA	{	<i>[Together.]</i>	{	I adore the shape of this hall—it's
RICHARD.				so——
				The train was awfully crowded coming
				down——

*[They both stop again, and there is another dead silence, during which the curtain slowly falls.]*

## ACT II

*It is after dinner on the Saturday evening. David and Myra are seated on the settee down right. Sandy and Jackie are seated on form below piano. Sorel is standing down centre with her back to the audience. Simon is seated on right arm of sofa. Richard is seated on sofa. Judith is seated in chair down left. Every one is talking and arguing.*

*The following scene should be played with great speed.*

SIMON. Who 'll go out?

SOREL. I don't mind.

SIMON. No; you always guess it too quickly.

JACKIE. What do we have to do?

JUDITH. Choose an adverb, and then——

SIMON. Someone goes out, you see, and comes in, and you've chosen a word among yourselves, and she or he, whoever it is, asks you some sort of question, and you have to——

SOREL. [*Moves up to Simon.*] Not an ordinary question, Simon; they have to ask them to do something in the manner of the word, and then——

SIMON. Then, you see, you act whatever it is——

SOREL. The answer to the question, you see?

RICHARD. [*Apprehensively.*] What sort of thing is one expected to do?

JUDITH. Quite usual things, like reciting 'If,' or playing the piano——

RICHARD. I can't play the piano.

SIMON. Never mind; you can fake it, as long as it conveys an idea of the word.

JACKIE. The word we've all thought of?

SOREL. [*Impatient.*] Yes, the word we've chosen when whoever it is is out of the room.

JACKIE. I'm afraid I don't quite understand yet.

SIMON. Never mind; I'll explain. You see, someone goes out. . . .

SOREL. I'll go out the first time, just to show her.



JUDITH. It's quite simple—all you have to do is just act in the manner of the word.

SOREL. Look here, everybody, I'm going out.

SIMON. All right; go on.

*[Sorel moves to door down left but stops in doorway as Myra speaks.]*

MYRA. The History game's awfully good—when two people go out, and come back as Mary Queen of Scots and Crippen or somebody.

SANDY. *[Despondently.]* I'm no earthly good at this sort of thing.

SOREL. I'll show you, Sandy. You see . . .

JUDITH. There's always 'How, When, and Where?' We haven't played that for ages.

SIMON. We will afterwards. We'll do this one first. Go on, Sorel.

SOREL. Don't be too long. *[She goes out door down left.]*

SIMON. *[Rises and faces company.]* Now then.

JUDITH. 'Bitterly.'

SIMON. No, we did that last week; she'll know.

DAVID. 'Intensely.'

JUDITH. Too difficult.

RICHARD. There was an amusing game I played once at the Harringtons' house. Every one was blindfolded except—

SIMON. *[Goes back to corner of sofa.]* This room's not big enough for that. What about 'winsomely'?

JACKIE. I wish I knew what we had to do.

JUDITH. You'll see when we start playing.

MYRA. *[Rises and crosses to table behind sofa, takes cigarette and lights it.]* If we start playing.

SIMON. Mother's brilliant at this. Do you remember when we played it at the Mackenzies'?

JUDITH. Yes, and Blanche was so cross when I kissed Freddie's ear in the manner of the word.

RICHARD. What was the word?

JUDITH. I can't remember.

MYRA. *[Having lit cigarette she returns to her seat.]* Perhaps it's as well.

DAVID. What about 'drearily'?

JUDITH. Not definite enough.

SIMON. 'Winsomely' is the best.

JUDITH. She's sure to guess it straight off.

- SANDY. [*Confidentially to Jackie.*] These games are much too brainy for me.
- DAVID. Young Norman Robertson used to be marvellous—do you remember?
- SIMON. Yes, wonderful sense of humour.
- MYRA. He's lost it all since his marriage.
- JUDITH. I didn't know you knew him.
- MYRA. Well, considering he married my cousin—— [*Pause.*]
- RICHARD. We don't seem to be getting on with the game
- JUDITH. We haven't thought of a word yet.
- MYRA. 'Brightly.'
- SIMON. Too obvious.
- MYRA. Very well—don't snap at me!
- JUDITH. 'Saucily.' I've got a lovely idea for 'saucily.'
- MYRA. [*To Simon.*] I should think 'rudely' would be the easiest.
- SIMON. Don't be sour, Myra.
- JUDITH. The great thing is to get an obscure word.
- SIMON. What a pity Irene isn't here—she knows masses of obscure words.
- MYRA. She's probably picked them up from her obscure friends.
- SIMON. It's no use being catty about Irene; she's a perfect darling.
- MYRA. I wasn't being catty at all.
- SIMON. Yes, you were.
- SOREL. [*Off.*] Hurry up!
- JUDITH. Quickly, now! We must think——
- JACKIE. [*Rises and comes centre—helpfully.*] 'Appendicitis.'
- JUDITH. [*Witheringly.*] That's not an adverb.
- SIMON. You're thinking of charades. [*Jackie returns to her seat.*]
- SANDY. Charades are damned good fun.
- SIMON. Yes, but we don't happen to be doing them at the moment.
- SANDY. Sorry.
- JUDITH. 'Saucily.'
- SIMON. No, 'winsomely' is better.
- JUDITH. All right. Call her in.
- SIMON. [*Calling.*] Sorel—come on; we're ready.
- SANDY. [*Hoarsely to Simon.*] Which is it—'saucily' or 'winsomely'?
- SIMON. [*Whispering.*] 'Winsomely.'

*Re-enter Sorel. She moves to centre.*

SOREL. [*To Judith.*] Go and take a flower out of that vase and give it to Richard.

JUDITH. Very well.

*[She trips lightly over to the vase on the piano, gurgling with coy laughter, selects a flower, then goes over to Richard; pursing her lips into a mock smile, she gives him the flower with a little girlish gasp at her own daring and wags her finger archly at him, and returns to her seat. Richard puts flower on sofa table and sits again.]*

SIMON. Marvellous, mother!

SOREL. [*Laughing.*] Oh, lovely! [*Looking round the company.*] Now, Myra, get up and say good-bye to every one in the manner of the word.

MYRA. [*Rises and starts with David.*] Good-bye. It really has been most delightful——

JUDITH. No, no, no!

MYRA. [*Moves centre.*] Why—what do you mean?

JUDITH. You haven't got the right intonation a bit.

SIMON. Oh, mother darling, do shut up!

MYRA. [*Acidly.*] Remember what an advantage you have over we poor amateurs, Judith, having been a professional for so long. [*Returns to her seat.*]

JUDITH. I don't like 'so long' very much.

SOREL. Do you think we might go on now?

MYRA. Go to the next one; I'm not going to do any more.

SIMON. Oh, please do. You were simply splendid.

SOREL. It doesn't matter. [*To Richard.*] Light a cigarette in the manner of the word. [*Richard rises.*]

RICHARD. [*Takes cigarette from box on sofa table.*] I've forgotten what it is.

JUDITH. [*Grimacing at him violently.*] You remember. . . .

RICHARD. Oh, yes.

*[He goes to Sorel centre and proceeds to light a cigarette with great abandon, winking his eye and chucking Sorel under the chin, then looks round panic-stricken.]*

JUDITH. Oh, no, no, no!

MYRA. I can't think *what* that's meant to be.

RICHARD. [*Offended.*] I was doing my best.

JUDITH. It's so *frightfully* easy, and nobody can do it right.

SIMON. I believe you've muddled it up.



RICHARD. [*Returns to his seat.*] You'd better go on to the next one.

JUDITH. Which word were you doing? Whisper——

RICHARD. [*Leans over to her, whispering.*] 'Saucily.'

JUDITH. I knew it!—he was doing the wrong word.

[*She whispers to him.*]

RICHARD. Oh, I see. I'm so sorry.

JUDITH. Give him another chance.

SIMON. No, it's Jackie's turn now; it will come round to him again, I'm afraid.

SOREL. [*Moves to Jackie.*] Do a dance in the manner of the word.

JACKIE. [*Giggling.*] I can't.

JUDITH. Nonsense! Of course you can.

JACKIE. I can't—honestly—I . . .

SIMON. [*Crosses and pulls her to her feet.*] Go on; have a shot at it.

JACKIE. No, I'd much rather not. Count me out.

JUDITH. Really, the ridiculous fuss every one makes——

JACKIE. I'm awfully stupid, at anything like this.

SOREL. It's only a game, after all.

DAVID. Come along—try.

JACKIE. [*Dragging back.*] I couldn't—please don't ask me to. I simply couldn't. [*She sits again.*]

SIMON. Leave her alone if she doesn't want to.

SOREL. [*Irritably.*] What's the use of playing at all, if people won't do it properly!

JUDITH. It's so simple.

SANDY. It's awfully difficult if you haven't done it before.

SIMON. Go on to the next one.

SOREL. [*Firmly.*] Unless every one's in it we won't play at all.

SIMON. Now, don't lose your temper.

SOREL. Lose my temper! I like that! No one's given me the slightest indication of what the word is—you all argue and squabble——

DAVID. Talk, talk, talk! Everybody talks too much.

JUDITH. It's so surprising to me when people won't play up. After all——

JACKIE. [*With spirit.*] It's a hateful game, anyhow, and I don't want to play it again ever.

SOREL. You haven't played it at all yet.

SIMON. Don't be rude, Sorel.

SOREL. Really, Simon, the way you go on is infuriating!

SIMON. It's always the same; whenever Sorel goes out she gets quarrelsome.

SOREL. Quarrelsome!

SIMON. [*Patting her hand in a fatherly fashion.*] Don't worry, Jackie; you needn't do anything you don't want to.

JUDITH. I think, for the future, we'd better confine our efforts to social conversation and not attempt anything in the least intelligent.

SIMON. How can you be so unkind, mother!

JUDITH. [*Sharply.*] Don't speak to me like that!

JACKIE. [*Speaking winsomely.*] It's all my fault—I know I'm awfully silly, but it embarrasses me so terribly doing anything in front of people.

SOREL. [*With acidity.*] I should think the word was 'winsomely.'

SIMON. You must have been listening outside the door, then.

SOREL. Not at all—Miss Coryton gave it away.

SIMON. Why 'Miss Coryton' all of a sudden? You've been calling her Jackie all the evening. You're far too grand, Sorel.

SOREL. [*Stamping her foot.*] And you're absolutely maddening—I'll never play another game with you as long as I live!

SIMON. That won't break my heart.

JUDITH. Stop, stop, stop!

SIMON. [*Grabbing Jackie's hand—he pulls her up to window.*] Come out in the garden. I'm sick of this.

SOREL. [*Following them up and shouting after them.*] Don't let him take you on the river; he isn't very good at it.

SIMON. [*Over his shoulder.*] Ha ha!—very funny!

[*He drags Jackie off. Sorel returns to centre.*]

JUDITH. Sorel, you're behaving disgracefully.

SOREL. Simon ought to go into the army, or something.

DAVID. You both ought to be in reformatories.

SOREL. This always happens whenever we play a game. We're a beastly family, and I hate us.

JUDITH. Speak for yourself, dear.

SOREL. I can't, without speaking for every one else too—we're all exactly the same, and I'm ashamed of us. [*Grasps Sandy's hand and drags him off door left.*] Come into the library, Sandy.

MYRA. [*Rises and goes to table behind sofa.*] Charming! It's all perfectly charming!

DAVID. [*Rising and standing right centre.*] I think it would be better, Judith, if you exercised a little more influence over the children.

JUDITH. That's right—blame it all on me.

DAVID. After all, dear, you started it, by snapping everybody up.

JUDITH. [*Rises and crosses to him.*] You ought never to have married me, David; it was a great mistake.

DAVID. The atmosphere of this house is becoming more unbearable every day, and all because Simon and Sorel are allowed to do exactly what they like.

JUDITH. You sit upstairs all day, writing your novels.

DAVID. Novels which earn us our daily bread.

JUDITH. 'Daily bread'—nonsense! [*Crosses down right.*] We've got enough money to keep us in comfort until we die.

DAVID. That will be very soon, if we can't get a little peace. [*To Myra.*] Come out into the garden.

*[They both go up to window.]*

JUDITH. I sincerely hope the night air will cool you.

DAVID. [*Coming down to Judith.*] I don't know what's happened to you, lately, Judith.

JUDITH. Nothing's happened to me—nothing ever does. You're far too smug to allow it.

DAVID. Smug! Thank you.

JUDITH. Yes, smug, smug, smug! And pompous!

DAVID. I hope you haven't been drinking, dear?

JUDITH. Drinking! [*Laughs.*] Huh! that's very amusing!

DAVID. I think it's rather tragic, at your time of life.

*[He goes out with Myra. Judith goes after them as if to speak, changes her mind, and comes down to left corner of sofa.]*

JUDITH. David's been a good husband to me, but he's wearing a bit thin now.

RICHARD. [*Rises.*] Would you like me to go? To leave you alone for a little?

JUDITH. Why? Are you afraid I shall become violent?

RICHARD. [*Smiling.*] No; I merely thought perhaps I was in the way.

JUDITH. I hope you're not embarrassed—I couldn't bear you to be embarrassed.

RICHARD. Not in the least.

JUDITH. Marriage is a hideous affair altogether, don't you think?

RICHARD. I'm really hardly qualified to judge, you see—

JUDITH. Do stop being non-committal, just for once; it's doubly annoying in the face of us all having lost control so lamentably.

RICHARD. I'm sorry.

JUDITH. There's nothing to be sorry for, really, because, after all, it's your particular 'thing,' isn't it?—observing everything and not giving yourself away an inch.

RICHARD. I suppose it is.



JUDITH. You'll get used to us in time, and then you'll feel cosier. Why don't you sit down? *[She sits on sofa.]*

RICHARD. *[Sits beside her.]* I'm enjoying myself very much.

JUDITH. It's very sweet of you to say so, but I don't see how you can be.

RICHARD. *[Laughing suddenly.]* But I am!

JUDITH. There now, that was quite a genuine laugh! We're getting on. Are you in love with Sorel?

RICHARD. *[Surprised and embarrassed.]* In love with Sorel?

JUDITH. *[Repentantly.]* Now I've killed it—I've murdered the little tender feeling of comfort that was stealing over you, by sheer tactlessness! Will you teach me to be tactful?

RICHARD. Did you really think I was in love with Sorel?

JUDITH. It's so difficult to tell, isn't it?—I mean, you might not know yourself. She's very attractive.

RICHARD. Yes, she is—very.

JUDITH. Have you heard her sing?

RICHARD. No, not yet.

JUDITH. She sings beautifully. Are you susceptible to music?

RICHARD. I'm afraid I don't know very much about it.

JUDITH. You probably are, then. I'll sing you something.

RICHARD. Please do.

JUDITH. *[Rises and crosses to piano; he rises and stands centre.]*

It's awfully sad for a woman of my temperament to have a grown-up daughter, you know. I have to put my pride in my pocket and develop in her all the charming little feminine tricks which will eventually cut me out altogether.

RICHARD. That wouldn't be possible.

JUDITH. I do hope you meant that, because it was a sweet remark. *[She is at the piano, turning over music.]*

RICHARD. *[Crosses to piano.]* Of course I meant it.

JUDITH. Will you lean on the piano in an attentive attitude? It's such a help.

RICHARD. *[Leaning on piano.]* You're an extraordinary person.

JUDITH. *[Beginning to play.]* In what way extraordinary?

RICHARD. When I first met Sorel, I guessed what you'd be like.

JUDITH. Did you, now? And am I?

RICHARD. *[Smiling.]* Exactly.

JUDITH. Oh, well! . . .

*[She plays and sings a little French song. There is a slight pause when it is finished.]*

RICHARD. *[With feeling.]* Thank you.

JUDITH. *[Rising from the piano.]* It's pretty, isn't it?

RICHARD. Perfectly enchanting.

JUDITH. [*Crosses to sofa.*] Shall we sit down again?

[*She reseats herself on sofa.*]

RICHARD. [*Moving over to her.*] Won't you sing any more?

JUDITH. No, no more—I want you to talk to me and tell me all about yourself, and the things you've done.

RICHARD. [*Sits beside her.*] I've done nothing.

JUDITH. What a shame! Why not?

RICHARD. I never realize how *dead* I am until I meet people like you. It's depressing, you know.

JUDITH. What nonsense! You're not a bit dead.

RICHARD. Do you always live here?

JUDITH. I'm going to, from now onwards. I intend to sink into a very beautiful old age. When the children marry, I shall wear a cap.

RICHARD. [*Smiling.*] How absurd!

JUDITH. I don't mean a funny cap.

RICHARD. You're far too full of vitality to sink into anything.

JUDITH. It's entirely spurious vitality. If you troubled to look below the surface, you'd find a very wistful and weary spirit. I've been battling with life for a long time.

RICHARD. Surely such successful battles as yours have been are not wearying?

JUDITH. Yes, they are—frightfully. I've reached an age now when I just want to sit back and let things go on around me—and they do.

RICHARD. I should like to know exactly what you're thinking about—really.

JUDITH. I was thinking of calling you Richard. It's such a nice uncompromising name.

RICHARD. I should be very flattered if you would.

JUDITH. I won't suggest you calling me Judith until you feel really comfortable about me.

RICHARD. But I do—Judith.

JUDITH. I'm awfully glad. Will you give me a cigarette?

RICHARD. [*Producing case.*] Certainly.

JUDITH. [*Taking one.*] Oh, what a divine case!

RICHARD. It was given to me in Japan three years ago. All those little designs mean things.

JUDITH. [*Bending over it.*] What sort of things?

[*He lights her cigarette.*]

RICHARD. Charms for happiness, luck, and—love.

JUDITH. Which is the charm for love?

RICHARD. That one.

JUDITH. What a dear! [*Richard kisses her gently on the neck. She sits upright, with a scream.*] Richard!

RICHARD. [*Stammering.*] I'm afraid I couldn't help it.

JUDITH. [*Dramatically.*] What are we to do? What are we to do?

RICHARD. I don't know.

JUDITH. [*Rises, thrusts the case in his hand and crosses to right centre.*] David must be told—everything!

RICHARD. [*Alarmed.*] Everything?

JUDITH. [*Enjoying herself.*] Yes, yes. There come moments in life when it is necessary to be honest—absolutely honest. I've trained myself always to shun the underhand methods other women so often employ—the truth must be faced fair and square——

RICHARD. [*Extremely alarmed.*] The truth? I don't quite understand. [*He rises.*]

JUDITH. Dear Richard, you want to spare me, I know—you're so chivalrous; but it's no use. After all, as I said before, David has been a good husband to me, according to his lights. This may, of course, break him up rather, but it can't be helped. I wonder—oh, I wonder how he'll take it! They say suffering's good for writers, it strengthens their psychology. Oh, my poor, poor David! Never mind. You'd better go out into the garden and wait——

RICHARD. [*Flustered.*] Wait? What for? [*Moves to centre.*]

JUDITH. For me, Richard, for me. I will come to you later. Wait in the summer-house. I had begun to think that Romance was dead, that I should never know it again. Before, of course, I had my work and my life in the theatre, but now, nothing—nothing! Everything is empty and hollow, like a broken shell.

[*She sinks on to form below piano, and looks up at Richard with a tragic smile, then looks quickly away.*]

RICHARD. Look here, Judith, I apologize for what I did just now. I——

JUDITH. [*Ignoring all interruption, she rises and crosses to left centre.*] But now you have come, and it's all changed—it's magic! I'm under a spell that I never thought to recapture again. Go along—— [*She pushes him towards the garden.*]

RICHARD. [*Protesting.*] But, Judith——

JUDITH. [*Pushing him firmly until he is off.*] Don't—don't make



it any harder for me. I am quite resolved—and it's the only possible way. Go, go!

*[She pushes him into the garden and waves to him bravely with her handkerchief; then she comes back into the room and powders her nose before the glass and pats her hair into place. Then, assuming an expression of restrained tragedy, she opens the library door, screams and recoils genuinely shocked to centre. After a moment or two, Sorel and Sandy come out rather sheepishly and stand left centre.]*

SOREL. Look here, mother, I——

JUDITH. Sorel, what am I to say to you?

SOREL. I don't know, mother.

JUDITH. Neither do I.

SANDY. It was my fault, Mrs Bliss—Judith——

JUDITH. What a fool I've been! What a blind fool!

SOREL. Mother, are you *really* upset?

JUDITH. *[With feeling.]* I'm stunned!

SOREL. But, darling——

JUDITH. *[Gently.]* Don't speak for a moment, Sorel; we must all be very quiet, and think——

SOREL. It was nothing, really. For heaven's sake——

JUDITH. Nothing! I open the library door casually, and what do I see? I ask you, what do I see?

SANDY. I'm most awfully sorry. . . .

JUDITH. Sssh! It has gone beyond superficial apologies.

SOREL. Mother, be natural for a minute.

JUDITH. I don't know what you mean, Sorel. I'm trying to realize a very bitter truth as calmly as I can.

SOREL. There's nothing so very bitter about it.

JUDITH. My poor child!

SOREL. *[Suddenly.]* Very well, then! I love Sandy, and he loves me!

JUDITH. That is the only possible excuse for your behaviour.

SOREL. Why shouldn't we love each other if we want to?

JUDITH. Sandy was in love with me this afternoon.

SOREL. Not real love—you know it wasn't.

JUDITH. *[Bitterly.]* I know now.

SANDY. *[Crosses to left of Judith.]* I say—look here—I'm most awfully sorry.

JUDITH. There's nothing to be sorry for, really; it's my fault for having been so—so ridiculous.

SOREL. Mother!

JUDITH. [*Sadly.*] Yes, ridiculous. [*Goes up to piano.*] I'm getting old, old, and the sooner I face it the better.

[*She picks up mirror, looks at herself, and puts it down again quickly.*]

SOREL. [*Hopelessly.*] But, darling. . . .

JUDITH. [*Splendidly—she goes to Sorel.*] Youth will be served. You're so pretty, Sorel, far prettier than I ever was—I'm very glad you're pretty.

SANDY. [*Moving down right.*] I feel a fearful cad.

JUDITH. Why should you? You've answered the only call that really counts—the call of Love, and Romance, and Spring. I forgive you, Sandy, completely. There!

[*She goes to him and pats his shoulder.*]

SOREL. Well, that's all right then.

[*She sits on sofa.*]

JUDITH. I resent your tone, Sorel; you seem to be taking things too much for granted. Perhaps you don't realize that I am making a great sacrifice.

[*Pointing to Sandy.*]

SOREL. Sorry, darling.

JUDITH. [*Starting to act.*] It's far from easy, at my time of life, to——

SOREL. [*Playing up.*] Mother—mother, say you understand and forgive!

JUDITH. Understand! You forget, dear, I am a woman.

SOREL. I know you are, mother. That's what makes it all so poignant.

JUDITH. [*Magnanimously, to Sandy.*] If you want Sorel, truly, I give her to you—unconditionally.

SANDY. [*Dazed.*] Thanks—awfully, Mrs Bliss.

JUDITH. You can still call me Judith, can't you?—it's not much to ask.

SANDY. Judith!

JUDITH. [*Bravely.*] There, now. Away with melancholy. This is all tremendously exciting, and we must all be very happy.

SOREL. Don't tell father—yet.

JUDITH. We won't tell anybody; it shall be *our* little secret.

SOREL. You are splendid, mother!

JUDITH. Nonsense! I just believe in being honest with myself—it's awfully good for one, you know, so cleansing. I'm going upstairs now to have a little aspirin—— [*She goes upstairs, and turns.*] Ah, Youth, Youth, what a strange, mad muddle you make of things!

[*She goes off upstairs. Sorel heaves a slight sigh.*]

SOREL. Well, that's that!

SANDY. Yes. [*Sits on form below piano, looking very gloomy.*]

SOREL. It's all right. Don't look so gloomy—I know you don't love me really.

SANDY. [*Startled.*] I say, Sorel——

SOREL. Don't protest; you know you don't—any more than I love you.

SANDY. But you told Judith——

SOREL. [*Nonchalantly.*] I was only playing up—one always plays up to mother in this house; it's a sort of unwritten law.

SANDY. Didn't she mean all she said?

SOREL. No, not really; we none of us ever mean *anything*.

SANDY. She seemed awfully upset.

SOREL. It must have been a slight shock for her to discover us clasped tightly in each other's arms.

SANDY. [*Rising and moving to centre.*] I believe I do love you, Sorel.

SOREL. A month ago I should have let you go on believing that, but now I can't—I'm bent on improving myself.

SANDY. I don't understand.

SOREL. Never mind—it doesn't matter. You just fell a victim to the atmosphere, that's all. There we were alone in the library, with the windows wide open, and probably a nightingale somewhere about——

SANDY. I only heard a cuckoo.

SOREL. Even a cuckoo has charm, in moderation. [*Rises and goes to him.*] You kissed me because you were awfully nice and I was awfully nice and we both liked kissing very much. It was inevitable. Then mother found us and got dramatic—her sense of the theatre is always fatal. She knows we shan't marry, the same as you and I do. You're under absolutely no obligation to me at all.

SANDY. I wish I understood you a bit better.

SOREL. Never mind about understanding me—let's go back into the library.

SANDY. All right. [*They go off door down left.*]

[*After a moment's pause, David and Myra enter from the garden.*]

DAVID. . . . and, you see, he comes in and finds her there waiting for him. [*They come down centre.*]

MYRA. She hadn't been away at all?

DAVID. No; and that's psychologically right, I'm sure. No woman, under those circumstances, *would*.



MYRA. [*Sitting on left end of sofa.*] It's brilliant of you to see that. I do think the whole thing sounds most excellent.

DAVID. I got badly stuck in the middle of the book, when the boy comes down from Oxford—but it worked out all right eventually.

MYRA. When shall I be able to read it?

DAVID. I'll send you the proofs—you can help me correct them.

MYRA. How divine! I shall feel most important.

DAVID. Would you like a cigarette, or anything?

MYRA. No, thank you.

DAVID. I think I'll have a drink.

*[He goes to the table up by window, and pours out some plain soda-water.]*

MYRA. Very well; give me some plain soda-water, then.

DAVID. There isn't any ice—d'you mind?

MYRA. Not a bit.

DAVID. [*Bringing her drink.*] Here you are.

*[He goes back and pours himself a whisky-and-soda, and returns to sofa.]*

MYRA. Thank you. [*She sips it.*] I wonder where everybody is.

DAVID. Not here, thank God.

MYRA. It must be dreadfully worrying for you, having a household of people.

DAVID. [*Sits down by her side.*] It depends on the people.

MYRA. I have a slight confession to make.

DAVID. Confession?

MYRA. Yes. Do you know why I came down here?

DAVID. Not in the least. I suppose one of us asked you, didn't they?

MYRA. Oh, yes, they asked me, but——

DAVID. Well?

MYRA. I was invited once before—last September.

DAVID. I was in America then.

MYRA. Exactly.

DAVID. How do you mean 'exactly'?

MYRA. I didn't come. I'm a very determined woman, you know, and I made up my mind to meet you ages ago.

DAVID. That was charming of you. I'm not much to meet really.

MYRA. You see, I'd read *Broken Reeds*.

DAVID. Did you like it?

MYRA. Like it! I think it's one of the finest novels I've ever read.

DAVID. There now!

MYRA. How do you manage to know so much about women?

DAVID. I'm afraid my knowledge of them is sadly superficial.

MYRA. Oh, no; you can't call Evelyn's character superficial—it's amazing.

DAVID. Why are you being so nice to me? Have you got a plan about something?

MYRA. [*Laughing.*] How suspicious you are!

DAVID. I can't help it—you're very attractive, and I'm always suspicious of attractive people, on principle.

MYRA. Not a very good principle.

DAVID. [*Leaning towards her.*] I'll tell you something—strictly between ourselves.

MYRA. Do!

DAVID. You're wrong about me.

MYRA. Wrong? In what way?

DAVID. I write very bad novels.

MYRA. Don't be so ridiculous!

DAVID. And you *know* I do, because you're an intelligent person.

MYRA. I don't know anything of the sort.

DAVID. Tell me why you're being nice to me.

MYRA. Because I want to be.

DAVID. Why?

MYRA. You're a very clever and amusing man.

DAVID. Splendid!

MYRA. And I think I've rather lost my heart to you.

DAVID. Shall we elope?

MYRA. David!

DAVID. There now, you've called me David!

MYRA. Do you mind?

DAVID. Not at all.

MYRA. I'm not sure that you're being very kind.

DAVID. What makes you think that?

MYRA. You being rather the cynical author laughing up his sleeve at a gushing admirer.

DAVID. I think you're a very interesting woman, and extremely nice-looking.

MYRA. Do you?

DAVID. Yes. Would you like me to make love to you?

MYRA. [*Rising.*] Really—I wish you wouldn't say things like that.

DAVID. I've knocked you off your plate—I'll look away for a minute while you climb on to it again. [*He does so.*]

MYRA. [*Laughing affectedly. She puts her glass down on table.*]

This is wonderful!

[*She sits down again.*]

DAVID. [*Turning.*] That's right. Now then——

MYRA. Now then, what?

DAVID. [*Leaning very close to her.*] You're adorable—you're magnificent—you're tawny——

MYRA. I'm not tawny.

DAVID. Don't argue.

MYRA. This is sheer affectation.

DAVID. Affectation's very nice.

MYRA. No, it isn't—it's odious.

DAVID. You mustn't get cross.

MYRA. I'm not in the least cross.

DAVID. Yes, you are—but you're very alluring.

MYRA. [*Perking up.*] Alluring?

DAVID. Terribly.

MYRA. I can hear your brain clicking—it's very funny.

DAVID. That was rather rude.

MYRA. You've been consistently rude to me for hours.

DAVID. Never mind.

MYRA. Why have you?

DAVID. I'm always rude to people I like.

MYRA. Do you like me?

DAVID. Enormously.

MYRA. How sweet of you!

DAVID. But I don't like your methods.

MYRA. Methods? What methods?

DAVID. You're far too pleasant to occupy yourself with the commonplace.

MYRA. And you spoil yourself by trying to be clever.

DAVID. Thank you.

MYRA. Anyhow, I don't know what you mean by commonplace.

DAVID. You mean you want me to explain?

MYRA. Not at all.

DAVID. Very well; I will.

MYRA. I shan't listen.

[*She stops up her ears.*]

DAVID. You'll pretend not to, but you'll hear every word really.

MYRA. [*Sarcastically.*] You're so inscrutable and quizzical—just what a feminine psychologist should be.

DAVID. Yes, aren't I?

MYRA. You frighten me dreadfully.

DAVID. Darling!

MYRA. Don't call me darling.



DAVID. That's unreasonable. You've been trying to make me—all the evening.

MYRA. Your conceit is outrageous!

DAVID. It's not conceit at all. You've been firmly buttering me up because you want a nice little intrigue.

MYRA. [*Rising.*] How dare you!

DAVID. [*Pulling her down again.*] It's true, it's true. If it weren't, you wouldn't be so angry.

MYRA. I think you're insufferable!

DAVID. [*Taking her hand.*] Myra—dear Myra——

MYRA. [*Snatching it away—she rises.*] Don't touch me!

DAVID. Let's have that nice little intrigue. [*He rises.*] The only reason I've been so annoying is that I love to see things as they are first, and then pretend they're what they're not.

MYRA. Words. [*Moves over right.*] Masses and masses of words!

DAVID. [*Following her.*] They're great fun to play with.

MYRA. I'm glad you think so. Personally, they bore me stiff.

DAVID. [*Catching her right hand again.*] Myra—don't be statuesque.

MYRA. Let go my hand!

DAVID. You're charming.

MYRA. [*Furiously.*] Let go my hand!

DAVID. I won't!

MYRA. You will!

[*She slaps his face hard, and he seizes her in his arms and kisses her.*]

DAVID. [*Between kisses.*] You're—perfectly—sweet.

MYRA. [*Giving in.*] David!

DAVID. You must say it's an entrancing amusement.

[*He kisses her again.*]

[*Judith appears at the top of the stairs and sees them. They break away, he still keeping hold of her hand.*]

JUDITH. [*Coming down centre.*] Forgive me for interrupting.

DAVID. Are there any chocolates in the house?

JUDITH. No, David.

DAVID. I should like a chocolate more than anything in the world, at the moment.

JUDITH. This is a very unpleasant situation, David.

DAVID. [*Agreeably.*] Horrible!

JUDITH. We'd better talk it all over.

MYRA. [*Making a movement.*] I shall do nothing of the sort!

JUDITH. Please—please don't be difficult.

DAVID. I apologize, Judith.

JUDITH. Don't apologize—I quite understand.

MYRA. Please let go of my hand, David; I should like to go to bed. *[She pulls her hand away.]*

JUDITH. I should stay if I were you—it would be more dignified.

DAVID. *[Moves a step towards Judith.]* There isn't any real necessity for a scene.

JUDITH. I don't want a scene. I just want to straighten things out.

DAVID. Very well—go ahead.

JUDITH. June has always been an unlucky month for me.

MYRA. Look here, Judith—I'd like to explain one thing—

JUDITH. *[Austerely.]* I don't wish to hear any explanations or excuses—they're so cheapening. This was bound to happen sooner or later—it always does, to everybody. The only thing is to keep calm.

DAVID. I am—perfectly.

JUDITH. *[Sharply.]* There is such a thing as being too calm.

DAVID. Sorry, dear.

JUDITH. Life has dealt me another blow, but I don't mind.

DAVID. What did you say?

JUDITH. *[Crossly.]* I said Life had dealt me another blow, but I didn't mind.

DAVID. Rubbish!

JUDITH. *[Gently.]* You're probably irritable, dear, because you're in the wrong. It's quite usual.

DAVID. Now, Judith—

JUDITH. Ssshhh! Let me speak—it is my right.

MYRA. I don't see why.

JUDITH. *[Surprised.]* I am the injured party, am I not?

MYRA. Injured?

JUDITH. *[Firmly.]* Yes, extremely injured.

DAVID. *[Contemptuously.]* Injured!

JUDITH. Your attitude, David, is nothing short of deplorable.

DAVID. It's all nonsense—sheer, unbridled nonsense!

JUDITH. No, David, you can't evade the real issues as calmly as that. I've known for a long time—I've realized subconsciously for years that you've stopped caring for me in 'that way.'

DAVID. *[Irritably.]* What do you mean—'that way'?

JUDITH. *[With a wave of the hand.]* Just that way. . . . It's rather tragic, but quite inevitable. I'm growing old now—men don't grow old like women, as you'll find to your cost,

Myra, in a year or two. David has retained his youth astonishingly, perhaps because he has had fewer responsibilities and cares than I——

MYRA. This is all ridiculous hysteria.

DAVID. [*Goes to Myra.*] No, Myra—Judith is right. What are we to do?

MYRA. [*Furious.*] Do? Nothing!

JUDITH. [*Ignoring her.*] Do you love her truly, David?

DAVID. [*Looks Myra up and down as if to make sure.*] Madly!

MYRA. [*Astounded.*] David!

DAVID. [*Intensely.*] You thought just now that I was joking. Couldn't you see that all my flippancy was only a mask, hiding my real emotions—crushing them down desperately——?

MYRA. [*Scared.*] But, David, I——

JUDITH. I knew it! The time has come for the dividing of the ways.

MYRA. What on earth do you mean?

JUDITH. I mean that I am not the sort of woman to hold a man against his will.

MYRA. You're both making a mountain out of a molehill. David doesn't love me madly, and I don't love him. It's——

JUDITH. Ssshhh!—you *do* love him. I can see it in your eyes—in your every gesture. David, I give you to her—freely and without rancour. We must all be good friends, always.

DAVID. Judith, do you mean this?

JUDITH. [*With a melting look.*] You know I do.

DAVID. How can we ever repay you?

JUDITH. Just by being happy. [*Sits on sofa.*] I may leave this house later on—I have a feeling that its associations may become painful, specially in the autumn——

MYRA. Look here, Judith——

JUDITH. [*Shouting her down.*] October is such a mournful month in England. I think I shall probably go abroad—perhaps a *pension* somewhere in Italy, with cypresses in the garden. I've always loved cypresses, they are such sad, weary trees.

DAVID. [*Goes to her, speaking in a broken voice.*] What about the children?

JUDITH. We must share them, dear.

DAVID. I'll pay you exactly half the royalties I receive from everything, Judith.

JUDITH. [*Bowing her head.*] That's very generous of you.

DAVID. You have behaved magnificently. This is a crisis in our lives, and thanks to you——



MYRA. [*Almost shrieking—moves over to Judith, but is stopped by David.*] Judith—I will speak—I——

DAVID. [*Speaking in a very dramatic voice.*] Ssshhh, Myra darling—we owe it to Judith to keep control of our emotions—a scene would be agonizing for her now. She has been brave and absolutely splendid throughout. Let's not make things harder for her than we can help. Come, we'll go out into the garden.

MYRA. I will *not* go out into the garden.

JUDITH. [*Twisting her handkerchief.*] Please go. [*Rises to left centre.*] I don't think I can bear any more just now.

DAVID. So this is the end, Judith?

JUDITH. Yes, my dear—the end. [*They shake hands sadly. Simon enters violently from the garden, and breaks in between them.*]

SIMON. Mother—mother, I've got something important to tell you.

JUDITH. [*Smiling bravely.*] Very well, dear.

SIMON. Where's Sorel.

JUDITH. In the library, I'm afraid.

SIMON. [*Runs to library door and shouts off.*] Sorel, come out—I've got something vital to tell you. [*Returns to centre.*]

DAVID. [*Fatherly.*] You seem excited, my boy! What has happened?

SOREL. [*Enters with Sandy and remains down left.*] What's the matter?

SIMON. I wish you wouldn't all look so depressed—it's good news!

DAVID. Good news! I thought perhaps Jackie had been drowned——

SIMON. No, Jackie hasn't been drowned—she's been something else.

JUDITH. Simon, what *do* you mean?

SIMON. [*Running up centre, calling off.*] Jackie—Jackie! [*Jackie enters coyly from the garden. Simon takes her hand and leads her down centre.*] She has become engaged—to me!

JUDITH. [*In heartfelt tones.*] Simon!

SOREL. Good heavens!

JUDITH. Simon, my dear! Oh, this is too much!

[*She cries a little.*]

SIMON. What on earth are you crying about, mother?

JUDITH. [*Picturesquely.*] All my chicks leaving the nest! Now I shall only have my memories left. Jackie, come and kiss me.

[*Jackie goes to her. Simon goes to his father, who congratulates him.*] You must promise to make my son happy——

JACKIE. [*Worried.*] But, Mrs Bliss——

JUDITH. Ssshhh! I understand. I have not been mother for nothing.

JACKIE. [*Wildly.*] But it's not true—we don't——

JUDITH. You're trying to spare my feelings—I know——

MYRA. [*Furiously.*] Well, I'm not going to spare your feelings, or any one else's. You're the most infuriating set of hypocrites I've ever seen. This house is a complete feather-bed of false emotions—you're posing, self-centred egotists, and I'm sick to death of you.

SIMON. Myra!

MYRA. Don't speak to me—I've been working up for this, only every time I opened my mouth I've been mowed down by theatrical effects. You haven't got one sincere or genuine feeling among the lot of you—you're artificial to the point of lunacy. It's a great pity you ever left the stage, Judith—it's your rightful home. You can rant and roar there as much as ever you like——

JUDITH. Rant and roar! May God forgive you!

MYRA. And let me tell you this——

SIMON. [*Interrupting.*] I'm not going to allow you to say another word to mother——

[*They all try to shout each other down.*]

SOREL. } You ought to be ashamed of yourself——

MYRA. } [*Together.*] Let me speak—I will speak——

DAVID. } Look here, Myra——

JUDITH. } This is appalling—appalling!

SOREL. } You must be stark, staring mad——

MYRA. } [*Together.*] Never again—never as long as I live——

DAVID. } You don't seem to grasp one thing that——

SIMON. } Why are you behaving like this, anyhow?

[*In the middle of the pandemonium of every one talking at once, Richard comes in from the garden. He looks extremely apprehensive, imagining that the noise is the outcome of Judith's hysterical confession of their lukewarm passion. He goes to Judith's side, summoning all his diplomatic forces. As he speaks every one stops talking.*]

RICHARD. [*With forced calm.*] What's happened? Is this a game?

[*Judith's face gives a slight twitch; then, with a meaning look at Sorel and Simon, she answers him.*]

JUDITH. [*With spirit.*] Yes, and a game that must be played to the finish!

[*She flings back her arm and knocks Richard up stage.*]

SIMON. [*Grasping the situation.*] Zara! What does this mean?  
[*Advancing to her.*]

JUDITH. [*In bell-like tones.*] So many illusions shattered—so many dreams trodden in the dust——

DAVID. [*Collapsing on to the form in hysterics.*] Love's Whirlwind! Dear old Love's Whirlwind!

SOREL. [*Runs over to right, pushes Myra up stage and poses.*] I don't understand. You and Victor—My God!

JUDITH. [*Moves away left, listening.*] Hush! Isn't that little Pam crying——?

SIMON. [*Savagely.*] She 'll cry more, poor mite, when she realizes her mother is a—a——

JUDITH. [*Shrieking and turning to Simon.*] Don't say it! Don't say it!

SOREL. Spare her that.

JUDITH. I've given you all that makes life worth living—my youth, my womanhood, and now my child. Would you tear the very heart out of me? I tell you, it's infamous that men like you should be allowed to pollute society. You have ruined my life. I have nothing left—nothing! God in heaven, where am I to turn for help? . . .

SOREL. [*Through clenched teeth—swings Simon round.*] Is this true? Answer me—is this true?

JUDITH. [*Wailing.*] Yes, yes!

SOREL. [*As if to strike Simon.*] You cur!!!

JUDITH. Don't strike! He is your father!!!!

[*She totters and falls in a dead faint. Myra, Jackie, Richard, and Sandy look on dazed and aghast.*]

CURTAIN



### ACT III

*It is Sunday morning, about ten o'clock. There are various breakfast dishes on a side table, left, and a big table is laid down left centre.*

*Sandy appears at the top of the stairs. On seeing no one about, he comes down quickly and furtively helps himself to eggs and bacon and coffee, and seats himself at the table. He eats very hurriedly, casting occasional glances over his shoulder. A door bangs somewhere upstairs, which terrifies him; he chokes violently. When he has recovered he tears a bit of toast from a rack, butters it and marmalades it, and crams it into his mouth. Then, hearing somebody approaching, he darts into the library.*

*Jackie comes down stairs timorously; her expression is dismal, to say the least of it. She looks miserably out of the window at the pouring rain, then assuming an air of spurious bravado, she helps herself to some breakfast and sits down and looks at it. After one or two attempts to eat it, she bursts into tears.*

*Sandy opens the library door a crack, and peeps out. Jackie, seeing the door move, screams. Sandy re-enters.*

JACKIE. Oh, it's only you—you frightened me!

SANDY. What's the matter?

JACKIE. [Sniffing.] Nothing.

SANDY. I say, don't cry. [Sits down at the table facing her.]

JACKIE. I'm not crying.

SANDY. You were—I heard you.

JACKIE. It's this house. It gets on my nerves.

SANDY. I don't wonder—after last night.

JACKIE. What were you doing in the library just now?

SANDY. Hiding.

JACKIE. Hiding?

SANDY. Yes; I didn't want to run up against any of the family.

JACKIE. I wish I'd never come. I had horrible nightmares with all those fearful dragons crawling across the walls.

SANDY. Dragons?

JACKIE. Yes; I'm in a Japanese room—everything in it's Japanese, even the bed.

SANDY. How awful!

JACKIE. [*Looks up at stairs to see if any one is coming.*] I believe they 're all mad, you know.

SANDY. The Blisses?

JACKIE. Yes—they must be.

SANDY. I 've been thinking that too.

JACKIE. Do you suppose they know they 're mad?

SANDY. No; people never do.

JACKIE. It was Mr Bliss asked me down and he hasn't paid any attention to me at all. I went into his study soon after I arrived yesterday, and he said, 'Who the hell are you?'

SANDY. Didn't he remember?

JACKIE. He did afterwards; then he brought me down to tea and left me.

SANDY. Are you really engaged to Simon?

JACKIE. [*Bursting into tears again.*] Oh, no—I hope not!

SANDY. You were, last night.

JACKIE. So were you—to Sorel.

SANDY. Not properly. We talked it over.

JACKIE. I don't know what happened to me. I was in the garden with Simon, and he was being awfully sweet, and then he suddenly kissed me, and rushed into the house and said we were engaged—and that hateful Judith asked me to make him happy!

SANDY. That 's exactly what happened to me and Sorel. Judith *gave* us to one another before we knew where we were.

JACKIE. How frightful!

SANDY. I like Sorel, though; she was jolly decent about it afterwards.

JACKIE. I think she 's a cat.

SANDY. Why?

JACKIE. Look at the way she lost her temper over that beastly game.

SANDY. All the same, she 's better than the others.

JACKIE. That wouldn't be very difficult.

SANDY. [*Hiccups loudly.*] Hic!

JACKIE. I beg your pardon?

SANDY. [*Abashed.*] I say—I 've got hiccups.

JACKIE. Hold your breath.

SANDY. It was because I bolted my breakfast.

[*He holds his breath.*]

JACKIE. Hold it as long as you can.

[*Jackie counts aloud. There is a pause.*]

SANDY. [*Letting his breath go with a gasp.*] I can't any more—hic!

JACKIE. [*Rises and gets sugar basin from side table down left.*] Eat a lump of sugar.

SANDY. [*Taking one.*] I'm awfully sorry.

JACKIE. I don't mind—but it's a horrid feeling, isn't it?

SANDY. Horrid—hic!

JACKIE. [*Puts sugar basin down in front of Sandy and sits again—conversationally.*] People have died from hiccups you know.

SANDY. [*Gloomily.*] Have they?

JACKIE. Yes. An aunt of mine once had them for three days without stopping.

SANDY. How beastly!

JACKIE. [*With relish.*] She had to have the doctor, and everything.

SANDY. I expect mine will *stop* soon.

JACKIE. I hope they will.

SANDY. Hic! Damn!

JACKIE. Drink some water the wrong way round.

SANDY. How do you mean—the wrong way round?

JACKIE. [*Rising.*] The wrong side of the glass. I'll show you. [*She goes to side left.*] There isn't any water.

SANDY. [*Rises and stands below table.*] Perhaps coffee would do as well.

JACKIE. I've never tried coffee, but it might. [*Picks up his cup and hands it to him.*] There you are!

SANDY. [*Anxiously.*] What do I do?

JACKIE. Tip it up and drink from the opposite side, sort of upside down.

SANDY. [*Trying.*] I can't reach any——

JACKIE. [*Suddenly.*] Look out—somebody's coming. Bring it into the library—quick.

SANDY. Bring the sugar. [*Jackie picks up sugar basin and runs into library, leaving Sandy to follow.*] I might need it again—hic! Oh, God! [*He goes off into the library hurriedly.*

[*Richard comes downstairs. He glances round a trifle anxiously, goes to the window, looks out at the rain and shivers, then pulling himself together, he goes boldly to the barometer and taps it. It falls off the wall and breaks; he picks it up quickly and places it on the piano. Then he helps himself to some breakfast and sits down centre chair left of table. Myra appears on the stairs, very smart and bright.*



MYRA. [*Vivaciously.*] Good morning.

RICHARD. [*Half rising.*] Good morning.

MYRA. Are we the first down?

RICHARD. No, I don't think so.

MYRA. [*Looking out of the window.*] Isn't this rain miserable?

RICHARD. Appalling! [*Starts to drink his coffee.*]

MYRA. Where's the barometer? [*Crosses to side table left.*]

RICHARD. [*At the mention of barometer, Richard chokes.*] On the piano.

MYRA. What a queer place for it to be!

RICHARD. I tapped it, and it fell down.

MYRA. Typical of this house. [*At side table.*] Are you having eggs and bacon, or haddock?

RICHARD. Haddock.

MYRA. I'll have haddock too. I simply couldn't strike out a line for myself this morning. [*She helps herself to haddock and coffee, and sits down opposite Richard.*] Have you seen anybody?

RICHARD. No.

MYRA. Good. We might have a little peace.

RICHARD. Have you ever stayed here before?

MYRA. No, and I never will again.

RICHARD. I feel far from well this morning.

MYRA. I'm so sorry, but not entirely surprised.

RICHARD. You see, I had the boiler room.

MYRA. How terrible!

RICHARD. The window stuck and I couldn't open it—I was nearly suffocated. The pipes made peculiar noises all night, as well.

MYRA. [*Looks round table.*] There isn't any sugar.

RICHARD. Oh—we'd better ring.

MYRA. I doubt if it will be the slightest use, but we'll try.

RICHARD. [*Rising and ringing bell, above door left.*] Do the whole family have breakfast in bed?

MYRA. I neither know—nor care.

RICHARD. [*Returns to his seat.*] They're strange people, aren't they?

MYRA. I think 'strange' is putting it mildly.

*Enter Clara. She comes to top of table.*

CLARA. What's the matter?

MYRA. There isn't any sugar.

CLARA. There is—I put it 'ere myself.

MYRA. Perhaps you 'd find it for us, then?

CLARA. [*Searching.*] That 's very funny. I could 'ave sworn on me Bible oath I brought it in.

MYRA. Well, it obviously isn't here now.

CLARA. Someone 's taken it—that 's what it is.

RICHARD. It seems a queer thing to do.

MYRA. Do you think you could get us some more?

CLARA. Oh, yes, I 'll fetch you some. [*Looks suspiciously and shakes her finger at Richard.*] But mark my words, there 's been some 'anky-panky somewhere.

[*She goes out. Richard looks after her.*]

MYRA. Clara is really more at home in a dressing-room than a house.

RICHARD. Was she Judith's dresser?

MYRA. Of course. What other excuse could there possibly be for her?

RICHARD. She seems good-natured, but quaint.

MYRA. This haddock 's disgusting.

RICHARD. It isn't very nice, is it?

[*Re-enter Clara, with sugar. She plumps it down on the table.*]

CLARA. There you are, dear!

MYRA. Thank you.

CLARA. It 's a shame the weather 's changed—you might 'ave 'ad such fun up the river. [*There comes the sound of a crash from the library, and a scream.*] What 's that? [*Crosses to door and flings it open.*] Come out! What are you doing?

*Jackie and Sandy enter, rather shamefaced.*

JACKIE. Good morning. I 'm afraid we 've broken a coffee-cup.

CLARA. Was there any coffee in it?

SANDY. Yes, a good deal.

CLARA. [*Rushing into the library.*] Oh dear, all over the carpet!

SANDY. It was my fault. I 'm most awfully sorry.

[*Jackie moves up left, above table. Clara reappears.*]

CLARA. How did you come to do it?

JACKIE. Well, you see, he had the hiccups, and I was showing him how to drink upside down.

MYRA. How ridiculous!

CLARA. Well, thank 'eaven it wasn't one of the Crown Derbys.  
[*She goes out.*]

SANDY. They 've gone now, anyhow.

*[Moves up to window and looks out.]*

JACKIE. It was the sudden shock, I expect.

SANDY. *[Observantly.]* I say—it 's raining!

MYRA. It 's been raining for hours.

RICHARD. Mrs Arundel——

MYRA. Yes?

RICHARD. What are you going to do about—about to-day?

MYRA. Nothing, except go up to London by the first train possible.

RICHARD. Do you mind if I come too? I don't think I could face another day like yesterday.

JACKIE. Neither could I.

*[Comes down to chair below Richard and sits.]*

SANDY. *[Comes eagerly to top of table and sits.]* Let 's all go away—quietly!

RICHARD. Won't it seem a little rude if we *all* go?

MYRA. Yes, it will. *[To Sandy.]* You and Miss Coryton must stay.

JACKIE. I don't see why.

SANDY. I don't think they 'd mind *very* much.

MYRA. Yes, they would. You must let Mr Greatham and me get away first, anyhow. Ring for Clara. I want to find out about trains. *[Sandy rings bell and returns to his seat.]*

RICHARD. I hope they won't all come down now.

MYRA. You needn't worry about that; they 're sure to roll about in bed for hours—they 're such a slovenly family.

RICHARD. Have you got much packing to do?

MYRA. No; I did most of it before I came down.

*Re-enter Clara—comes to top of table.*

CLARA. What is it now? .

MYRA. Can you tell me what trains there are up to London?

CLARA. When?

MYRA. This morning.

CLARA. Why?—you 're not leaving, are you?

MYRA. Yes; Mr Greatham and I have to be up by lunch-time.

CLARA. Well, you 've missed the 10.15.

MYRA. Obviously.

CLARA. There isn't another till 12.30.

RICHARD. Good heavens!

CLARA. And that 's a slow one.

*[She goes out.]*



SANDY. [*To Jackie.*] Look here. I'll take you up in my car as soon as you like.

JACKIE. All right; lovely!

MYRA. Oh, you have got a car, haven't you?

SANDY. Yes.

MYRA. Will it hold all of us?

JACKIE. You said it would be rude for us all to go. Hadn't you and Mr Greatham better wait for the train?

MYRA. Certainly not.

RICHARD. [*To Sandy.*] If there is room, we should be very, very grateful.

SANDY. I think I can squeeze you in.

MYRA. Then that's settled.

JACKIE. When shall we start?

SANDY. As soon as you're ready. [*Rises.*]

JACKIE. Mrs Arundel, what are you going to do about tipping Clara?

MYRA. I don't know. [*To Richard.*] What do you think?

RICHARD. I've hardly seen her since I've been here.

JACKIE. Isn't there a housemaid or anything?

RICHARD. I don't think so.

SANDY. Is ten bob enough?

JACKIE. Each?

MYRA. Too much.

RICHARD. We'd better give her one pound ten between us.

MYRA. Very well, then. Will you do it, and we'll settle up in the car?

RICHARD. Must I?

MYRA. Yes. Ring for her.

RICHARD. You'd do it much better.

MYRA. Oh, no, I shouldn't. [*To Jackie.*] Come on; we'll finish our packing. [*Rises and goes to stairs.*]

JACKIE. All right.

[*She follows Myra. They begin to go up stairs.*]

RICHARD. [*Rises and goes to centre.*] Here—don't leave me.

SANDY. [*Crosses to door right.*] I'll just go and look at the car. Will you all be ready in ten minutes?

MYRA. Yes, ten minutes. [*She goes off with Jackie.*]

SANDY. Righto! [*He rushes out.*]

[*Richard moves over to bell as Clara re-enters with large tray.*]

CLARA. 'Allo, where's everybody gone?

RICHARD. [*Sorts out thirty shillings from his note-case.*] They've gone to get ready. We're leaving in Mr Tyrell's car.

CLARA. A bit sudden, isn't it?

RICHARD. [*Pressing the money into her hand.*] This is from all of us, Clara. Thank you very much for all your trouble.

CLARA. [*Surprised.*] Aren't you a dear, now! There wasn't any trouble.

RICHARD. There must have been a lot of extra work.

CLARA. One gets used to that 'ere.

RICHARD. Good morning, Clara.

CLARA. Good morning, hope you 've been comfortable.

RICHARD. Com—— Oh, yes. [*He goes up stairs.*]

[*Clara proceeds to clear away the dirty breakfast things, which she takes out singing 'Tea for Two' in a very shrill voice. She returns with a fresh pot of coffee, and meets Judith coming down stairs.*]

JUDITH. [*Goes to head of table and sits.*] Good morning, Clara. Have the papers come?

CLARA. Yes—I'll fetch them.

[*She goes out and re-enters with papers, which she gives to Judith.*]

JUDITH. Thank you. You've forgotten my orange-juice.

CLARA. [*Pours out a cup of coffee for Judith.*] No, I'ven't, dear; it's just outside. [*She goes out again.*]

[*Judith turns to the theatrical column of the 'Sunday Times.' Sorel comes down stairs and kisses her.*]

SOREL. Good morning, darling.

JUDITH. Listen to this. [*She reads.*] 'We saw Judith Bliss in a box at the Haymarket on Tuesday, looking as lovely as ever.' There now! I thought I looked hideous on Tuesday.

SOREL. You looked sweet.

[*She goes to get herself some breakfast, and sits left of Judith. Clara reappears with a glass of orange-juice.*]

CLARA. There you are, dear. [*Placing it in front of Judith.*] Did you see that nice bit in the *Referee*?

JUDITH. No—*The Times*.

CLARA. The *Referee*'s much better.

[*She finds the place and hands it to Sorel.*]

SOREL. [*Reading.*] 'I saw gay and colourful Judith Bliss at the *Waifs and Strays* matinée last week. She was talking vivaciously to Producer Basil Dean. "I' sooth," said I to myself, "where ignorance is Bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."'

JUDITH. [*Taking it from her.*] Dear *Referee*! It's so unself-conscious.

CLARA. If you want any more coffee, ring for it. [*She goes out.*]

SOREL. I wish I were sitting on a lovely South Sea Island, with masses of palm-trees and coco-nuts and turtles——

JUDITH. It would be divine, wouldn't it?

SOREL. I wonder where everybody is.

JUDITH. [*Still reading.*] I wonder . . . Mary Saunders has got another failure.

SOREL. She must be used to it by now.

[*Simon comes down stairs with a rush.*]

SIMON. [*Kissing Judith.*] Good morning, darling. Look!

[*He shows her a newly completed sketch.*]

JUDITH. Simon! How lovely! When did you do it?

SIMON. This morning—I woke early.

SOREL. Let's see.

[*Takes sketch from Simon.*]

SIMON. [*Looking over her shoulder.*] I'm going to alter Helen's face; it's too pink.

SOREL. [*Laughing.*] It's exactly like her.

[*Puts it on chair beside her.*]

JUDITH. [*Patting his cheek.*] What a clever son I have!

SIMON. Now then, mother!

[*He gets himself breakfast.*]

JUDITH. It's too wonderful—when I think of you both in your perambulators. . . . Oh dear, it makes me cry!

[*She sniffs.*]

SOREL. I don't believe you ever saw us in our perambulators.

JUDITH. I don't believe I did.

[*Simon, having got his breakfast, sits at table right of Judith.*]

*David comes down stairs.*

DAVID. [*Hilariously.*] It's finished!

JUDITH. What, dear?

DAVID. *The Sinful Woman.*

[*He kisses Judith.*]

JUDITH. How splendid! Read it to us now.

DAVID. [*Takes chair from table and sits left centre.*] I've got the last chapter here.

JUDITH. Go on, then.

*Sandy rushes in from the front door. On seeing every one, he halts.*

SANDY. Good morning.

[*He bolts upstairs, two at a time. There is a pause, they all look after him.*]

JUDITH. I seem to know that boy's face.

DAVID. [*Preparing to read.*] Listen! You remember that bit when Violet was taken ill in Paris?



JUDITH. Yes, dear.—Marmalade, Simon. [*He passes it to her.*]

DAVID. Well, I'll go on from there.

JUDITH. Do, dear.

DAVID. [*Reading.*] 'Paris in spring, with the Champs-Élysées alive and dancing in the sunlight; lightly-dressed children like gay painted butterflies——'

SIMON. [*Shouting to Sorel.*] What's happened to the barometer?

SOREL. [*Sibilantly.*] I don't know.

DAVID. Damn the barometer!

JUDITH. Don't get cross, dear.

DAVID. Why can't you keep quiet, Simon, or go away.

SIMON. Sorry, father.

DAVID. Well, don't interrupt again . . . [*Reading.*] '. . . gay painted butterflies; the streets were thronged with hurrying vehicles, the thin peek-peek of taxi-hooters——'

SOREL. I love 'peek-peek.'

DAVID. [*Ignoring her.*] '—seemed to merge in with the other vivid noises, weaving a vast pattern of sound which was Paris——'

JUDITH. What was Paris, dear?

DAVID. *Which* was Paris.

JUDITH. What was Paris?

DAVID. You can't say a vast pattern of sound *what* was Paris.

[*A slight pause.*]

JUDITH. Yes, but—— What was Paris?

DAVID. A vast pattern of sound *which* was Paris.

JUDITH. Oh, I see.

DAVID. 'Jane Sefton, in her scarlet Hispano, swept out of the Rue Saint-Honoré into the Place de la Concorde——'

JUDITH. She couldn't have.

DAVID. Why?

JUDITH. The Rue Saint-Honoré doesn't lead into the Place de la Concorde.

DAVID. Yes, it does.

SOREL. You're thinking of the Rue Boissy-d'Anglais, father.

DAVID. I'm not thinking of anything of the sort.

JUDITH. David darling, don't be obstinate.

DAVID. [*Hotly.*] Do you think I don't know Paris as well as you do?

SIMON. Never mind. Father's probably right.

SOREL. He isn't right—he's wrong!

DAVID. Go on with your food, Sorel.

JUDITH. Don't be testy, David; it's a sign of age.

DAVID. [*Firmly.*] 'Jane Sefton, in her scarlet Hispano, swept out of the Rue Saint-Honoré into the Place de la Concorde——'

JUDITH. That sounds absolutely ridiculous! Why don't you alter it?

DAVID. It isn't ridiculous; it's perfectly right.

JUDITH. Very well, then; get a map, and I'll show you.

SIMON. We haven't got a map.

DAVID. [*Putting his MS. down.*] Now, look here, Judith—here's the Rue Royale—[*he arranges the butter-dish and marmalade pot*]—here's the Crillon Hotel, and *here's* the Rue Saint-Honoré—

JUDITH. It isn't—it's the Boissy-d'Anglais.

DAVID. That runs parallel with the Rue de Rivoli.

JUDITH. You've got it all muddled.

DAVID. [*Loudly—banging the table with his fist.*] I have *not* got it all muddled.

JUDITH. Don't shout. You have.

SIMON. Why not let father get on with it?

JUDITH. It's so silly to get cross at criticism—it indicates a small mind.

DAVID. Small mind my foot!

JUDITH. That was very rude. I shall go to my room in a minute.

DAVID. I wish you would.

JUDITH. [*Outraged.*] David!

SOREL. Look here, father, mother's right. [*Starts to draw map.*] Here's the Place de la Concorde——

SIMON. [*Shouting at her.*] Oh, shut up, Sorel!

SOREL. [*Shouting back at him.*] Shut up yourself, you pompous little beast!

SIMON. You think you know such a lot about everything, and you're as ignorant as a frog.

SOREL. Why a *frog*?

JUDITH. I give you my solemn promise, David, that you're wrong.

DAVID. I don't want your solemn promise, because I *know* I'm right.

SIMON. It's no use arguing with father, mother.

SOREL. Why isn't it any use arguing with father?

SIMON. Because you're both so pig-headed!

DAVID. Are you content to sit here, Judith, and let your son insult me?

JUDITH. He's your son as well as mine.

DAVID. I begin to doubt it.

JUDITH. [*Bursting into tears of rage.*] David!

SIMON. [*Consoling her.*] Father, how can you!

DAVID. [*Throwing his MS. on floor.*] I'll never attempt to read any of you anything again, as long as I live. You're not a bit interested in my work, and you don't give a damn whether I'm a success or a failure.

JUDITH. You're dead certain to be a failure if you cram your books with inaccuracies.

DAVID. [*Hammering the table with his fist.*] *I am not inaccurate!*

JUDITH. Yes—[*rising*—you are; and you're foul-tempered and spoilt.

DAVID. Spoilt! I like that! Nobody here spoils me—you're the most insufferable family to live with—

JUDITH. Well, why in heaven's name don't you go and live somewhere else?

DAVID. There's gratitude!

JUDITH. Gratitude for what, I'd like to know?

SOREL. Mother, keep calm.

JUDITH. Calm! I'm furious.

DAVID. What have you got to be furious about? Every one rushing round adoring you and saying how wonderful you are——

JUDITH. I am wonderful, heaven knows, to have stood you for all these years!

SOREL. Mother, do sit down and be quiet. [*Rises.*

SIMON. [*Rises and puts his arm round his mother.*] How dare you speak to mother like that!

[*During this scene, Myra, Jackie, Richard, and Sandy creep down stairs with their bags, unperceived by the family. They make for the front door.*

JUDITH. [*Wailing.*] Oh, oh! To think that my daughter should turn against me!

DAVID. Don't be theatrical.

JUDITH. I'm not theatrical—I'm wounded to the heart.

DAVID. Rubbish—rubbish—rubbish!

JUDITH. Don't you say 'Rubbish' to me!

DAVID. I *will* say 'Rubbish'!

[*They all shout at each other as loud as possible.*

SOREL.	} [ <i>Together.</i> ]	{	Ssshhh, father!
SIMON.			That's right! Be the dutiful daughter
DAVID.			and encourage your father——
JUDITH.			Listen to me, Judith——
			Oh, this is dreadful—dreadful!



SOREL.	} [Together.]	{	The whole thing doesn't really matter in the least——
SIMON.			——to insult your mother——
DAVID.			The Place de la Concorde——
JUDITH.			I never realized how small you were, David. You're tiny.

[The universal pandemonium is suddenly broken by the front door slamming. There is dead silence for a moment, then the noise of a car is heard. Sorel runs and looks out of the window.]

SIMON. [Flops in his chair again.] There now!

SOREL. They've all gone!

JUDITH. [Sitting down.] How very rude!

DAVID. [Also sitting down.] People really do behave in the most extraordinary manner these days——

JUDITH. Come back and finish your breakfast, Sorel.

SOREL. All right. [She sits down. Pause.]

JUDITH. Go on, David darling; I'm dying to hear the end——

DAVID. [Picks up his MS. from the floor—reading.] 'Jane Sefton, in her scarlet Hispano, swept out of the Rue Saint-Honoré into the Place de la Concorde——'

CURTAIN



# JOURNEY'S END

R. C. SHERRIFF

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## CHARACTERS

STANHOPE, *commanding an infantry company*

OSBORNE

TROTTER

HIBBERT

RALEIGH

} *officers of the Company*

THE COLONEL

THE COMPANY SERGEANT-MAJOR

MASON, *the officers' cook*

HARDY, *an officer of another regiment*

A Young German Soldier

Two Private Soldiers of the Company

### ACT I

*Evening on Monday, the 18th March, 1918*

### ACT II

*Scene I : Tuesday morning*

*Scene II : Tuesday afternoon*

### ACT III

*Scene I : Wednesday afternoon*

*Scene II : Wednesday night*

*Scene III : Thursday, towards dawn*

## THE SCENE

*A dug-out in the British trenches before St Quentin.*

*A few rough steps lead into the trench above, through a low doorway. A table occupies a good space of the dug-out floor. A wooden frame, covered with wire netting, stands against the left wall and serves the double purpose of a bed and a seat for the table. A wooden bench against the back wall makes another seat, and two boxes serve for the other sides.*

*Another wire-covered bed is fixed in the right corner beyond the doorway.*

*Gloomy tunnels lead out of the dug-out to left and right.*

*Except for the table, beds, and seats, there is no furniture save the bottles holding the candles, and a few tattered magazine pictures pinned to the wall of girls in flimsy costumes.*

*The earth walls deaden the sounds of war, making them faint and far away, although the front line is only fifty yards ahead. The flames of the candles that burn day and night are steady in the still, damp air.*

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This play was first produced by the Incorporated Stage Society at the Apollo Theatre, 9th December 1928, with the following cast:

STANHOPE	.	.	.	Mr Laurence Oliver
OSBORNE	.	.	.	Mr George Zucco
TROTTER	.	.	.	Mr Melville Cooper
HIBBERT	.	.	.	Mr Robert Speaight
RALEIGH	.	.	.	Mr Maurice Evans
THE COLONEL	.	.	.	Mr H. G. Stoker
THE COMPANY SERGEANT-MAJOR	.	.	.	Mr Percy Walsh
MASON	.	.	.	Mr Alexander Field
HARDY	.	.	.	Mr David Horne
A Young German Soldier				Mr Geoffrey Wincott

*The play produced by Mr James Whale*

*Subsequently presented by Mr Maurice Browne at the Savoy Theatre, 21st January 1929*

## ACT I

*The evening of a March day. A pale glimmer of moonlight shines down the narrow steps into one corner of the dug-out. Warm yellow candle-flames light the other corner from the necks of two bottles on the table. Through the doorway can be seen the misty grey parapet of a trench and a narrow strip of starlit sky. A bottle of whisky, a jar of water, and a mug stand on the table amongst a litter of papers and magazines. An officer's equipment hangs in a jumbled mass from a nail in the wall.*

*Captain Hardy, a red-faced, cheerful-looking man, is sitting on a box by the table, intently drying a sock over a candle-flame. He wears a heavy trench-boot on his left leg, and his right foot, which is naked, is held above the damp floor by resting it on his left knee. His right boot stands on the floor beside him. As he carefully turns the sock this way and that—feeling it against his face to see if it is dry—he half sings, half hums a song—humming when he is not quite sure of the words, and marking time with the toes of his right foot.*

HARDY. One and Two, it 's with Maud and Lou;  
Three and Four, two girls more;  
Five and Six, it 's with—hm—hm—hm—  
Seven, Eight, Clara and Caroline—

*[He lapses into an indefinite humming, and finishes with a lively burst :*

*Tick!—Tock!—wind up the clock,  
And we 'll start the day over again.*

*[A man's legs appear in the moonlit trench above, and a tall, thin man comes slowly down the dug-out steps, stooping low to avoid the roof. He takes his helmet off and reveals a fine head, with close-cropped, iron-grey hair. He looks about forty-five—physically as hard as nails.*

HARDY. *[Looking round.]* Hallo, Osborne! Your fellows arriving?

OSBORNE. *[Hitching off his pack and dropping it in a corner.]*  
Yes. They 're just coming in.



HARDY. Splendid! Have a drink.

OSBORNE. Thanks. [*He crosses and sits on the left-hand bed.*]

HARDY. [*Passing the whisky and a mug.*] Don't have too much water. It's rather strong to-day.

OSBORNE. [*Slowly mixing a drink.*] I wonder what it is they put in the water.

HARDY. Some sort of disinfectant, I suppose.

OSBORNE. I'd rather have the microbes, wouldn't you?

HARDY. I would—yes——

OSBORNE. Well, cheero.

HARDY. Cheero. Excuse my sock, won't you?

OSBORNE. Certainly. It's a nice-looking sock.

HARDY. It is rather, isn't it? Guaranteed to keep the feet dry. Trouble is, it gets so wet doing it.

OSBORNE. Stanhope asked me to come and take over. He's looking after the men coming in.

HARDY. Splendid! You know, I'm awfully glad you've come.

OSBORNE. I heard it was a quiet bit of line up here.

HARDY. Well, yes—in a *way*. But you never know. Sometimes nothing happens for hours on end; then—all of a sudden—'over she comes!'—rifle grenades—Minnies—and those horrid little things like pineapples—you know.

OSBORNE. I know.

HARDY. Swish—swish—swish—swish—BANG!

OSBORNE. All right—all right—I know.

HARDY. They simply blew us to bits yesterday. Minnies—enormous ones; about twenty. Three bang in the trench. I really *am* glad you've come; I'm not simply being polite.

OSBORNE. Do much damage?

HARDY. Awful. A dug-out got blown up and came down in the men's tea. They were frightfully annoyed.

OSBORNE. I know. There's nothing worse than dirt in your tea.

HARDY. By the way, you know the big German attack's expected any day now?

OSBORNE. It's been expected for the last month.

HARDY. Yes, but it's very near now; there's funny things happening over in the Boche country. I've been out listening at night when it's quiet. There's more transport than usual coming up—you can hear it rattling over the *pavé* all night; more trains in the distance—puffing up and going away again, one after another, bringing up loads and loads of men——

OSBORNE. Yes. It's coming—pretty soon now.

HARDY. Are you here for six days?

OSBORNE. Yes.

HARDY. Then I should think you 'll get it—right in the neck.

OSBORNE. Well, you won't be far away. Come along, let's do this handing over. Where's the map?

HARDY. Here we are. [*He gropes among the papers on the table and finds a tattered map.*] We hold about two hundred yards of front line. We've got a Lewis gun just here—and one here, in this little sap. Sentry posts where the crosses are—

OSBORNE. Where do the men sleep?

HARDY. I don't know. The sergeant-major sees to that. [*He points off to the left.*] The servants and signallers sleep in there. Two officers in here, and three in there. [*He points to the right-hand tunnel.*] That is, if you've got five officers.

OSBORNE. We've only got four at present, but a new man's coming up to-night. He arrived at transport lines a day or two ago.

HARDY. I hope you get better luck than I did with *my* last officer. He got lumbago the first night and went home. Now he's got a job lecturing young officers on 'Life in the Front Line.'

OSBORNE. Yes. They do send some funny people over here nowadays. I hope we're lucky and get a youngster straight from school. They're the kind that do best.

HARDY. I suppose they are, really.

OSBORNE. Five beds, you say? [*He examines the one he is sitting on.*] Is this the best one?

HARDY. Oh, no. [*He points to the bed in the right corner.*] That's mine. The ones in the other dug-out haven't got any bottoms to them. You keep yourself in by hanging your arms and legs over the sides. Mustn't hang your legs too low, or the rats gnaw your boots.

OSBORNE. You got many rats here?

HARDY. I should say—roughly—about two million; but then, of course, I don't see them all. [*He begins to put on his sock and draw on his boot.*] Well, there's nothing else you want to know, is there?

OSBORNE. You haven't told me anything yet.

HARDY. What else do you *want* to know?

OSBORNE. Well, what about trench stores?

HARDY. You *are* a fussy old man. Anybody'd think you were in the Army. [*He finds a tattered piece of paper.*] Here you are: 115 rifle grenades—I shouldn't use them if I were you; they upset Jerry and make him offensive. Besides, they are

rusty, in any case. Then there's 500 Mills bombs, 34 gum boots——

OSBORNE. That's seventeen pairs——

HARDY. Oh, no; 25 right leg and 9 left leg. But everything's down here. *[He hands the list to Osborne.]*

OSBORNE. Did you check it when you took over?

HARDY. No. I think the sergeant-major did. It's quite all right.

OSBORNE. I expect Stanhope would like to see you before you go. He always likes a word with the company commander he's relieving.

HARDY. How is the dear young boy? Drinking like a fish, as usual?

OSBORNE. Why do you say that?

HARDY. Well, damn it, it's just the natural thing to ask about Stanhope. *[He pauses, and looks curiously at Osborne.]* Poor old man. It must be pretty rotten for you, being his second in command, and you such a quiet, sober old thing.

OSBORNE. He's a long way the best company commander we've got.

HARDY. Oh, he's a good chap, I know. But I never *did* see a youngster put away the whisky he does. D'you know, the last time we were out resting at Valennes he came to supper with us and drank a whole bottle in one hour fourteen minutes—we timed him.

OSBORNE. I suppose it amused everybody; I suppose everybody cheered him on, and said what a splendid achievement it was.

HARDY. He didn't want any 'cheering' on——

OSBORNE. No, but everybody thought it was a big thing to do. *[There is a pause.]* Didn't they?

HARDY. Well, you can't help, somehow, *admiring* a fellow who can do that—and then pick out his own hat all by himself and walk home——

OSBORNE. When a boy like Stanhope gets a reputation out here for drinking, he turns into a kind of freak show exhibit. People pay with a bottle of whisky for the morbid curiosity of seeing him drink it.

HARDY. Well, naturally, you're biased. You have to put him to bed when he gets home.

OSBORNE. It rather reminds you of bear-baiting—or cock-fighting—to sit and watch a boy drink himself unconscious.

HARDY. Well, damn it, it's pretty dull without *something* to



liven people up. I mean, after all—Stanhope really *is* a sort of freak; I mean it *is* jolly fascinating to see a fellow drink like he does—glass after glass. He didn't go home on his last leave, did he?

OSBORNE. No.

HARDY. I suppose he didn't think he was fit to meet papa.

[*A pause.*] You know his father's vicar of a country village?

OSBORNE. I know.

HARDY. [*Laughing.*] Imagine Stanhope spending his leave in a country vicarage sipping tea! He spent his last leave in Paris, didn't he?

OSBORNE. Yes.

HARDY. I bet it was *some* leave!

OSBORNE. Do you know how long he's been out here?

HARDY. A good time, I know.

OSBORNE. Nearly three years. He came out straight from school—when he was eighteen. He's commanded this company for a year—in and out of the front line. He's never had a rest. Other men come over here and go home again ill, and young Stanhope goes on sticking it, month in, month out.

HARDY. Oh, I know he's a jolly good fellow——

OSBORNE. I've seen him on his back all day with trench fever—then on duty all night——

HARDY. Oh, I know; he's a splendid chap!

OSBORNE. And because he's stuck it till his nerves have got battered to bits, he's called a drunkard.

HARDY. Not a drunkard; just a—just a hard drinker; but you're quite right about his nerves. They *are* all to blazes. Last time out resting we were playing bridge and something happened—I don't remember what it was; some silly little argument—and all of a sudden he jumped up and knocked all the glasses off the table! Lost control of himself; and then he—sort of—came to—and cried——

OSBORNE. Yes, I know.

HARDY. You heard about it?

OSBORNE. He told me.

HARDY. Did he? We tried to hush it up. It just shows the state he's in. [*He rises and puts on his pack. There is a pause.*] You know, Osborne, *you* ought to be commanding this company.

OSBORNE. Rubbish!

HARDY. Of course you ought. It sticks out a mile. I know he's got pluck and all that, but, damn it, man, you're twice

his age—and think what a dear, level-headed old thing you are.

OSBORNE. Don't be an ass. He was out here before I joined up. His experience alone makes him worth a dozen people like me.

HARDY. You know as well as I do, you ought to be in command.

OSBORNE. There isn't a man to touch him as a commander of men. He'll command the battalion one day if——

HARDY. Yes, if! *[He laughs.]*

OSBORNE. You don't know him as I do; I love that fellow. I'd go to hell with him.

HARDY. Oh, you sweet, sentimental old darling!

OSBORNE. Come along. Finish handing over and stop blithering.

HARDY. There's nothing else to do.

OSBORNE. What about the log-book?

HARDY. God! you are a worker. Oh, well. Here we are. *[He finds a tattered little book among the papers on the table.]* Written right up to date; here's my last entry: '5 p.m. to 8 p.m. All quiet. German airman flew over trenches. Shot a rat.'

OSBORNE. Did he?

HARDY. No, I shot the rat, you ass. Well, finish up your whisky. I want to pack my mug. I'll leave you that drop in the bottle.

OSBORNE. Thanks.

*[He drinks up his whisky and hands Hardy the mug.]*

HARDY. *[Tucking the mug into his pack.]* I'll be off.

OSBORNE. Aren't you going to wait and see Stanhope?

HARDY. Well, no, I don't specially want to see him. He's so fussy about the trenches. I expect they are rather dirty. He'll talk for hours if he catches me. *[He hitches his pack over his shoulders, hangs on his gas satchel, map-case, binoculars, compass-case, until he looks like a travelling pedlar. As he dresses.]* Well, I hope you have a nice six days. Don't forget to change your clothes if you get wet.

OSBORNE. No, papa.

HARDY. And don't forget about the big attack.

OSBORNE. Oh, Lord, no, I mustn't miss that; I'll make a note in my diary.

HARDY. *[Fully dressed.]* There we are! Do I look every inch a soldier?

OSBORNE. Yes. I should get quite a fright if I were a German and met you coming round a corner.

HARDY. I should bloody well hope you would.

OSBORNE. Shouldn't be able to run away for laughing.

HARDY. Now don't be rude. [*He leans over to light a cigarette from a candle, and looks down on the table.*] Well, I'm damned. Still at it!

OSBORNE. What is?

HARDY. Why, that earwig. It's been running round and round that candle since tea-time; must have done a mile.

OSBORNE. I shouldn't hang about here if I were an earwig.

HARDY. Nor should I. I'd go home. Ever had earwig races?

OSBORNE. No.

HARDY. Great fun. We've had 'em every evening.

OSBORNE. What are the rules?

HARDY. Oh, you each have an earwig, and start 'em in a line. On the word 'Go' you dig your earwig in the ribs and steer him with a match across the table. I won ten francs last night—had a *splendid* earwig. I'll give you a tip.

OSBORNE. Yes?

HARDY. Promise not to let it go any farther?

OSBORNE. Yes.

HARDY. Well, if you want to get the best pace out of an earwig, dip it in whisky—makes 'em go like hell!

OSBORNE. Right. Thanks awfully.

HARDY. Well, I must be off. Cheero!

OSBORNE. Cheero!

[*Hardy goes up the narrow steps into the trench above, singing softly and happily to himself:*

'One and Two, it's with Maud and Lou;  
Three and Four, two girls more——'

[*The words trail away into the night.*

[*Osborne rises and takes his pack from the floor to the bed by the table. While he undoes it a Soldier Servant comes out of the tunnel from the left with a table-cloth over his arm and a plate with half a loaf of bread on it.*

MASON. Excuse me, sir. Can I lay supper?

OSBORNE. Yes, do.

[*He shuffles up the papers from the table and puts them on the bed.*

MASON. Thank you, sir.

[*He lays the table.*

OSBORNE. What are you going to tempt us with to-night, Mason?

MASON. Soup, sir—cutlets—and pineapple.

OSBORNE. [*Suspiciously.*] Cutlets?



MASON. Well, sir—well, yes, sir—cutlets.

OSBORNE. What sort of cutlets?

MASON. Now, sir, you 've got me. I shouldn't like to commit meself too deep, sir.

OSBORNE. Ordinary ration meat?

MASON. Yes, sir. Ordinary ration meat, but a noo shape, sir. Smells like liver, sir, but it 'asn't got that smooth, wet look that liver's got. *[Mason leaves the dug-out.]*

*[Osborne sits up to the table and examines the map. Voices come from the trench above; a gruff voice says:]*

'This is "C" Company 'Ead-quarters, sir.'

*[A boyish voice replies:]*

'Oh, thanks.'

*[There is a pause, then the gruff voice says:]*

'Better go down, sir.'

*[The boyish voice replies:]*

'Yes. Righto.'

*[An officer comes groping down the steps and stands in the candle-light. He looks round, a little bewildered. He is a well-built, healthy-looking boy of about eighteen, with the very new uniform of a 2nd lieutenant.]*

*[Osborne looks up from the trench map, surprised and interested to see a stranger.]*

OSBORNE. Hallo!

RALEIGH. Good evening—*[He notices Osborne's grey hair and adds:]*—sir.

OSBORNE. You the new officer?

RALEIGH. Er—yes. I've been to Battalion Headquarters. They told me to report here.

OSBORNE. Good. We've been expecting you. Sit down, won't you?

RALEIGH. Thanks. *[He sits gingerly on the box opposite Osborne.]*

OSBORNE. I should take your pack off.

RALEIGH. Oh, right. *[He slips his pack from his shoulders.]*

OSBORNE. Will you have a drink?

RALEIGH. Er—well——

OSBORNE. You don't drink whisky?

RALEIGH. *[Hastily.]* Oh, yes—er—just a small one, sir.

OSBORNE. *[Pouring out a small whisky and adding water.]*

Whisky takes away the taste of the water——

RALEIGH. Oh, yes? *[He pauses, and laughs nervously.]*

OSBORNE.—and the water takes away the taste of the whisky.

*[He hands Raleigh the drink.]* Just out from England?

RALEIGH. Yes, I landed a week ago.

OSBORNE. Boulogne?

RALEIGH. Yes. [*A pause, then he self-consciously holds up his drink.*] Well, here's luck, sir.

OSBORNE. [*Taking a drink himself.*] Good luck. [*He takes out a cigarette case.*] Cigarette?

RALEIGH. Thanks.

OSBORNE. [*Holding a bottle across so that Raleigh can light his cigarette from the candle in it.*] Ever been up in the line before?

RALEIGH. Oh, no. You see, I only left school at the end of last summer term.

OSBORNE. I expect you find it a bit strange.

RALEIGH. [*Laughing.*] Yes—I do—a bit——

OSBORNE. My name's Osborne. I'm second in command of the company. You only call me 'sir' in front of the men.

RALEIGH. I see. Thanks.

OSBORNE. You'll find the other officers call me 'uncle.'

RALEIGH. Oh, yes? [*He smiles.*]

OSBORNE. What's *your* name?

RALEIGH. Raleigh.

OSBORNE. I knew a Raleigh. A master at Rugby.

RALEIGH. Oh? He may be a relation. I don't know. I've got lots of uncles and—and things like that.

OSBORNE. We've only just moved into these trenches. Captain Stanhope commands the company.

RALEIGH. [*Suddenly brightening up.*] I know. It's a frightful bit of luck.

OSBORNE. Why? D'you know him?

RALEIGH. Yes, rather! We were at school together—at least—of course—I was only a kid and he was one of the big fellows; he's three years older than I am.

[*There is a pause ; Osborne seems to be waiting for Raleigh to go on, then suddenly he says :*

OSBORNE. He's up in the front line at present, looking after the relief. [*Another pause.*] He's a splendid chap.

RALEIGH. *Isn't* he? He was skipper of rugger at Barford, and kept wicket for the eleven. A jolly good bat, too.

OSBORNE. Did you play rugger—and cricket?

RALEIGH. Oh, yes. Of course, I wasn't in the same class as Dennis—I say, I suppose I ought to call him Captain Stanhope?

OSBORNE. Just 'Stanhope.'

RALEIGH. I see. Thanks.

OSBORNE. Did you get your colours?

RALEIGH. I did for rugger. Not cricket.

OSBORNE. Rugger and cricket seem a long way from here.

RALEIGH. [*Laughing.*] They do, rather.

OSBORNE. We play a bit of soccer when we're out of the line.

RALEIGH. Good!

OSBORNE. [*Thoughtfully.*] So you were at school with Stanhope.

[*Pause.*] I wonder if he'll remember you? I expect you've grown in the last three years.

RALEIGH. Oh, I think he'll remember me. [*He stops, and goes on rather awkwardly.*] You see, it wasn't only that we were just at school together; our fathers were friends, and Dennis used to come and stay with us in the holidays. Of course, at school I didn't see much of him, but in the holidays we were terrific pals.

OSBORNE. He's a fine company commander.

RALEIGH. I bet he is. Last time he was on leave he came down to the school; he'd just got his M.C. and been made a captain. He looked splendid! It—sort of—made me feel——

OSBORNE. —keen?

RALEIGH. Yes. Keen to get out here. I was frightfully keen to get into Dennis's regiment. I thought, perhaps, with a bit of luck I might get to the same battalion.

OSBORNE. It's a big fluke to have got to the same company.

RALEIGH. I know. It's an amazing bit of luck. When I was at the base I did an awful thing. You see, my uncle's at the base—he has to detail officers to regiments——

OSBORNE. General Raleigh?

RALEIGH. Yes. I went to see him on the quiet and asked him if he could get me into this battalion. He bit my head off, and said I'd got to be treated like everybody else——

OSBORNE. Yes?

RALEIGH. —and next day I was told I *was* coming to this battalion. Funny, wasn't it?

OSBORNE. Extraordinary coincidence!

RALEIGH. And when I got to Battalion Headquarters, and the colonel told me to report to 'C' Company, I could have cheered. I expect Dennis'll be frightfully surprised to see me. I've got a message for him.

OSBORNE. From the colonel?

RALEIGH. No. From my sister.

OSBORNE. Your sister?

RALEIGH. Yes. You see, Dennis used to stay with us, and



naturally my sister—[*he hesitates*—well—perhaps I ought not——

OSBORNE. That's all right. I didn't actually know that Stanhope——

RALEIGH. They're not—er—officially engaged——

OSBORNE. No?

RALEIGH. She'll be awfully glad I'm with him here; I can write and tell her all about him. He doesn't say much in his letters; can we write often?

OSBORNE. Oh, yes. Letters are collected every day.

[*There is a pause.*]

RALEIGH. You don't think Dennis'll mind my—sort of—forcing myself into his company? I never thought of that; I was so keen.

OSBORNE. No, of course he won't. [*Pause.*] You say it's—it's a good time since you last saw him?

RALEIGH. Let's see. It was in the summer last year—nearly a year ago.

OSBORNE. You know, Raleigh, you mustn't expect to find him—quite the same.

RALEIGH. Oh?

OSBORNE. You see, he's been out here a long time. It—it tells on a man—rather badly——

RALEIGH. [*Thinking.*] Yes, of course, I suppose it does.

OSBORNE. You may find he's—he's a little bit quick-tempered.

RALEIGH. [*Laughing.*] Oh, I know old Dennis's temper! I remember once at school he caught some chaps in a study with a bottle of whisky. Lord! the roof nearly blew off. He gave them a dozen each with a cricket-stump. [*Osborne laughs.*] He was so keen on the fellows in the house keeping fit. He was frightfully down on smoking—and that sort of thing.

OSBORNE. You must remember he's commanded this company for a long time—through all sorts of rotten times. It's—it's a big strain on a man.

RALEIGH. Oh, it must be.

OSBORNE. If you notice a—difference in Stanhope—you'll know it's only the strain——

RALEIGH. Oh, yes.

[*Osborne rouses himself and speaks briskly.*]

OSBORNE. Now, let's see. We've got five beds here—one each. Two in here and three in that dug-out there. I'm afraid you'll have to wait until the others come and pick the beds they want.

RALEIGH. Righto!

OSBORNE. Have you got a blanket?

RALEIGH. Yes, in my pack.

[*He rises to get it.*]

OSBORNE. Better wait and unpack when you know where you are sleeping.

RALEIGH. Righto!

[*He sits down again.*]

OSBORNE. We never undress when we're in the line. You can take your boots off now and then in the daytime, but it's better to keep pretty well dressed always.

RALEIGH. I see. Thanks.

OSBORNE. I expect we shall each do about three hours on duty at a time and then six off. We all go on duty at stand-to. That's at dawn and dusk.

RALEIGH. Yes.

OSBORNE. I expect Stanhope'll send you on duty with one of us at first—till you get used to it.

[*There is a pause, Raleigh turns, and looks curiously up the steps into the night.*]

RALEIGH. Are we in the front line here?

OSBORNE. No. That's the support line outside. The front line's about fifty yards farther on.

RALEIGH. How frightfully quiet it is!

OSBORNE. It's often quiet—like this.

RALEIGH. I thought there would be an awful row here—all the time.

OSBORNE. Most people think that.

[*Pause.*]

RALEIGH. I've never known anything so quiet as those trenches we came by; just now and then I heard rifle firing, like the range at Bisley, and a sort of rumble in the distance.

OSBORNE. Those are the guns up north—up Wipers way. The guns are always going up there; it's never quiet like this.

[*Pause.*] I expect it's all very strange to you?

RALEIGH. It's—it's not exactly what I thought. It's just this—this quiet that seems so funny.

OSBORNE. A hundred yards from here the Germans are sitting in *their* dug-outs, thinking how quiet it is.

RALEIGH. Are they as near as that?

OSBORNE. About a hundred yards.

RALEIGH. It seems—uncanny. It makes me feel we're—we're all just waiting for something.

OSBORNE. We are, generally, just waiting for something. When anything happens, it happens quickly. Then we just start waiting again.

RALEIGH. I never thought it was like that.

OSBORNE. You thought it was fighting all the time?

RALEIGH. [*Laughing.*] Well, yes, in a way.

OSBORNE. [*After puffing at his pipe in silence for a while.*] Did you come up by trench to-night—or over the top?

RALEIGH. By trench. An amazing trench—turning and twisting for miles, over a sort of plain.

OSBORNE. Lancer's Alley it's called.

RALEIGH. Is it? It's funny the way it begins—in that ruined village, a few steps down into the cellar of a house—then right under the house and through a little garden—and then under the garden wall—then alongside an enormous ruined factory place—then miles and miles of plains, with those green lights bobbing up and down ahead—all along the front as far as you can see.

OSBORNE. Those are the Very lights. Both sides fire them over No Man's Land—to watch for raids and patrols.

RALEIGH. I knew they fired lights. [*Pause.*] I didn't expect so many—and to see them so far away.

OSBORNE. I know. [*He puffs at his pipe.*] There's something rather romantic about it all.

RALEIGH. [*Eagerly.*] Yes. I thought that, too.

OSBORNE. You must always think of it like that if you can. Think of it all as—as romantic. It helps.

*[Mason comes in with more dinner utensils.]*

MASON. D'you expect the captain soon, sir? the soup's 'ot.

OSBORNE. He ought to be here very soon now. This is Mr Raleigh, Mason.

MASON. Good evening, sir.

RALEIGH. Good evening.

MASON. [*To Osborne.*] I've 'ad rather a unpleasant surprise, sir.

OSBORNE. What's happened?

MASON. You know that tin o' pineapple chunks I got, sir?

OSBORNE. Yes?

MASON. Well, sir, I'm sorry to say it's apricots.

OSBORNE. Good heavens! It must have given you a turn.

MASON. I distinctly said 'Pineapple chunks' at the canteen.

OSBORNE. Wasn't there a label on the tin?

MASON. No, sir. I pointed that out to the man. I said was 'e *certain* it was pineapple chunks?

OSBORNE. I suppose he said he was.

MASON. Yes, sir. 'E said a leopard can't change its spots, sir.

OSBORNE. What have leopards got to do with pineapple?



MASON. That 's just what *I* thought, sir. Made me *think* there was something fishy about it. You see, sir, I know the captain can't stand the sight of apricots. 'E said next time we 'ad them 'e 'd wring my neck.

OSBORNE. Haven't you anything else?

MASON. There 's a pink blancmange I 've made, sir. But it ain't anywhere near stiff yet.

OSBORNE. Never mind. We must have the apricots and chance it.

MASON. Only I thought I 'd tell you, sir, so as the captain wouldn't blame me.

OSBORNE. All right, Mason. [*Voices are heard in the trench above.*] That sounds like the captain coming now.

MASON. [*Hastening away.*] I 'll go and dish out the soup, sir.

[*The voices grow nearer ; two figures appear in the trench above and grope down the steps—the leading figure tall and thin, the other short and fat. The tall figure is Captain Stanhope. At the bottom of the steps he straightens himself, pulls off his pack, and drops it on the floor. Then he takes off his helmet and throws it on the right-hand bed. Despite his stars of rank he is no more than a boy ; tall, slimly built, but broad-shouldered. His dark hair is carefully brushed ; his uniform, though old and war-stained, is well cut and cared for. He is good-looking, rather from attractive features than the healthy good looks of Raleigh. Although tanned by months in the open air, there is a pallor under his skin and dark shadows under his eyes. His short and fat companion—2nd Lieutenant Trotter—is middle-aged and homely looking. His face is red, fat, and round ; apparently he has put on weight during his war service, for his tunic appears to be on the verge of bursting at the waist. He carries an extra pack belonging to the officer left on duty in the line.*]

STANHOPE. [*As he takes off his pack, gas satchel, and belt.*] Has Hardy gone?

OSBORNE. Yes. He cleared off a few minutes ago.

STANHOPE. Lucky for him he did. I had a few words to say to Master Hardy. You never saw the blasted mess those fellows left the trenches in. Dug-outs smell like cess-pits ; rusty bombs ; damp rifle grenades ; it 's perfectly foul. Where are the servants?

OSBORNE. In there.

STANHOPE. [*Calling into Mason's dug-out.*] Hi! Mason!

MASON. [*Outside.*] Coming, sir! Just bringing the soup, sir.

STANHOPE. [*Taking a cigarette from his case and lighting it.*]

Damn the soup! Bring some whisky!

OSBORNE. Here's a new officer, Stanhope—just arrived.

STANHOPE. Oh, sorry. [*He turns and peers into the dim corner where Raleigh stands smiling awkwardly.*] I didn't see you in this miserable light.

[*He stops short at the sight of Raleigh. There is silence.*]

RALEIGH. Hallo, Stanhope!

[*Stanhope stares at Raleigh as though dazed. Raleigh takes a step forward, half raises his hand, then lets it drop to his side.*]

STANHOPE. [*In a low voice.*] How did you—get here?

RALEIGH. I was told to report to your company, Stanhope.

STANHOPE. Oh, I see. Rather a coincidence.

RALEIGH. [*With a nervous laugh.*] Yes.

[*There is a silence for a moment, broken by Osborne, in a matter-of-fact voice.*]

OSBORNE. I say, Stanhope, it's a terrible business. We thought we'd got a tin of pineapple chunks; it turns out to be apricots.

TROTTER. Ha! Give me apricots every time! I 'ate pineapple chunks; too bloomin' sickly for me!

RALEIGH. I'm awfully glad I got to your company, Stanhope.

STANHOPE. When did you get here?

RALEIGH. Well, I've only just come.

OSBORNE. He came up with the transport while you were taking over.

STANHOPE. I see.

[*Mason brings in a bottle of whisky, a mug, and two plates of soup—so precariously that Osborne has to help with the soup plates on to the table.*]

STANHOPE. [*With sudden forced gaiety.*] Come along, uncle! Come and sit here. [*He waves towards the box on the right of the table.*] You better sit there, Raleigh.

RALEIGH. Right!

TROTTER. [*Taking a pair of pince-nez from his tunic pocket, putting them on, and looking curiously at Raleigh.*] You Raleigh?

RALEIGH. Yes.

[*Pause.*]

TROTTER. I'm Trotter.

RALEIGH. Oh, yes?

[*Pause.*]

TROTTER. How are you?

RALEIGH. Oh, all right, thanks.

TROTTER. Been out 'ere before?

RALEIGH. No.

TROTTER. Feel a bit odd, I s'pose?

RALEIGH. Yes. A bit.

TROTTER. [*Getting a box to sit on.*] Oh, well, you'll soon get used to it; you'll feel you've been 'ere a year in about an hour's time.

*[He puts the box on its side and sits on it. It is too low for the table, and he puts it on its end. It is then too high. He tries the other side, which is too low; he finally contrives to make himself comfortable by sitting on his pack, placed on the side of the box. Mason arrives with two more plates of soup.]*

OSBORNE. What kind of soup is this, Mason?

MASON. It's yellow soup, sir.

OSBORNE. It's got a very deep yellow flavour.

TROTTER. [*Taking a melodious sip.*] It wants some pepper; bring some pepper, Mason.

MASON. [*Anxiously.*] I'm very sorry, sir. When the mess box was packed the pepper was omitted, sir.

TROTTER. [*Throwing his spoon with a clatter into the plate.*] Oh, I say, but damn it!

OSBORNE. We must have pepper. It's a disinfectant.

TROTTER. You must have pepper in soup!

STANHOPE. [*Quietly.*] Why wasn't it packed, Mason?

MASON. It—it was missed, sir.

STANHOPE. Why?

MASON. [*Miserably.*] Well, sir, I left it to——

STANHOPE. Then I advise you never to leave it to any one else again—unless you want to rejoin your platoon out there.

*[He points into the moonlit trench.]*

MASON. I'm—I'm very sorry, sir.

STANHOPE. Send one of the signallers.

MASON. Yes, sir. [*He hastens to the tunnel entrance and calls.*]  
Bert, you're wanted!

*[A soldier appears, with a rifle slung over his shoulder. He stands stiffly to attention.]*

STANHOPE. Do you know 'A' Company Headquarters?

SOLDIER. Yes, sir.

STANHOPE. Go there at once and ask Captain Willis, with my compliments, if he can lend me a little pepper.

SOLDIER. Very good, sir. [*He turns smartly and goes up the steps.*]



MASON. [*Stopping him for a moment to say confidentially.*] A screw of pepper, you ask for.

OSBORNE. We must have pepper.

TROTTER. I mean—after all—war's bad enough *with* pepper—[*noisy sip*]*—*but war without pepper—it's—it's bloody awful!

OSBORNE. What's it like outside?

TROTTER. Quiet as an empty 'ouse. There's a nasty noise going on up north.

OSBORNE. Wipers, I expect. I believe there's trouble up there. I wish we knew more of what's going on.

TROTTER. So do I. Still, my wife reads the papers every morning and writes and tells me.

OSBORNE. Hardy says they had a lively time here yesterday. Three big Minnies right in the trench.

TROTTER. I know. And they left the bloomin' 'oles for us to fill in. [*Mason arrives with cutlets on enamel plates.*] What's this?

MASON. Meat, sir.

TROTTER. I know that. What sort?

MASON. Sort of cutlet, sir.

TROTTER. Sort of cutlet, is it? You know, Mason, there's cutlets and cutlets.

MASON. I know, sir; that one's a cutlet.

TROTTER. Well, it won't let me cut it.

MASON. No, sir?

TROTTER. That's a joke.

MASON. Oh! Right, sir.

[*He goes out.*]

OSBORNE. [*Studying the map.*] There's a sort of ruin marked on this map—just in front of here, in No Man's Land—called Beauvais Farm.

TROTTER. That's what we saw sticking up, skipper. I wondered what it was.

STANHOPE. Better go out and look at it to-night.

TROTTER. I expect a nasty German'll 'op out of it and say, 'Ock der Kaiser.' I 'ate ruins in No Man's Land.

OSBORNE. There's only about sixty yards of No Man's Land, according to this map—narrower on the left, from the head of this sap; only about fifty.

TROTTER. [*Who has been looking curiously at Stanhope, eating his meal with lowered head.*] Cheer up, skipper. You do look glum!

STANHOPE. I'm tired.

OSBORNE. I should turn in and get some sleep after supper.

STANHOPE. I 've got hours of work before I sleep.

OSBORNE. I 'll do the duty roll and see the sergeant-major—and all that.

STANHOPE. That 's all right, uncle. I 'll see to it. [*He turns to Raleigh for the first time.*] Trotter goes on duty directly he 's had supper. You better go on with him—to learn.

RALEIGH. Oh, right.

TROTTER. Look 'ere, skipper, it 's nearly eight now; couldn't we make it 'alf-past?

STANHOPE. No. I told Hibbert he 'd be relieved at eight. Will you take from eleven till two, uncle?

OSBORNE. Right.

STANHOPE. Hibbert can do from two till four, and I 'll go on from then till stand-to. That 'll be at six.

TROTTER. Well, boys! 'Ere we are for six days again. Six bloomin' eternal days. [*He makes a calculation on the table.*] That 's a hundred and forty-four hours; eight thousand six 'undred and forty minutes. *That* doesn't sound so bad; we 've done twenty of 'em already. I 've got an idea! I 'm going to draw a hundred and forty-four little circles on a bit o' paper, and every hour I 'm going to black one in; that 'll make the time go all right.

STANHOPE. It 's five to eight now. You better go and relieve Hibbert. Then you can come back at eleven o'clock and black in three of your bloody little circles.

TROTTER. I 'aven't 'ad my apricots yet!

STANHOPE. We 'll keep your apricots till you come back.

TROTTER. I never knew anything like a war for upsetting meals. I 'm always down for dooty in the middle of one.

STANHOPE. That 's because you never stop eating.

TROTTER. Any'ow, let 's 'ave some coffee. Hi! Mason! Coffee!

MASON. Coming, sir!

TROTTER. [*Getting up.*] Well, I 'll get dressed. Come on, Raleigh.

RALEIGH. [*Rising quickly.*] Right!

TROTTER. Just wear your belt with revolver case on it. Must have your revolver to shoot rats. And your gas mask—come here—I 'll show you. [*He helps Raleigh.*] You wear it sort of tucked up under your chin like a serviette.

RALEIGH. Yes. I was shown the way at home.

TROTTER. Now your hat. That 's right. You don't want a walking-stick. It gets in your way if you have to run fast.

RALEIGH. Why—er—do you have to run fast?

TROTTER. Oh, Lord, yes, often! If you see a Minnie coming—that 's a big trench-mortar shell, you know—short for *Minny-werfer*—you see 'em come right out of the Boche trenches, right up in the air, then down, down, down; and you have to judge it and run like stink sometimes.

*[Mason comes in with two cups of coffee.]*

MASON. Coffee, sir?

TROTTER. Thanks. *[He takes the cup and drinks standing up.]*

RALEIGH. Thanks.

TROTTER. You might leave my apricots out, Mason. Put 'em on a separate plate and keep 'em in there.

*[He points to Mason's dug-out.]*

MASON. Very good, sir.

TROTTER. If you bring 'em in 'ere you never know *what* might 'appen to 'em.

MASON. No, sir.

TROTTER. 'B' Comapny on our right, aren't they, skipper?

STANHOPE. Yes. There 's fifty yards of undefended area between. You better patrol that a good deal.

TROTTER. Aye, aye, sir.

STANHOPE. Have a look at that Lewis gun position on the left. See what field of fire they 've got.

TROTTER. Aye, aye, sir. You don't want me to go out and look at that blinkin' ruin?

STANHOPE. I 'll see to that.

TROTTER. Good. I don't fancy crawling about on my belly after that cutlet. *[To Raleigh.]* Well, come on, my lad, let 's go and see about this 'ere war.

*[The two go up the steps, leaving Stanhope and Osborne alone.]*

*Mason appears at his dug-out door.*

MASON. Will you take apricots, sir?

STANHOPE. No, thanks.

MASON. Mr Osborne?

OSBORNE. No, thanks.

MASON. I 'm sorry about them being apricots, sir. I explained to Mr Osborne——

STANHOPE. *[Curtly.]* That 's all right, Mason—thank you.

MASON. Very good, sir. *[He goes out.]*

OSBORNE. *[Over by the right-hand bed.]* Will you sleep here? This was Hardy's bed.

STANHOPE. No. You sleep there. I 'd rather sleep by the table here. I can get up and work without disturbing you.



OSBORNE. This is a better one.

STANHOPE. You take it. Must have a little comfort in your old age, uncle.

OSBORNE. I wish you'd turn in and sleep for a bit.

STANHOPE. Sleep?—I can't sleep. [*He takes a whisky and water. A man appears in the trench and comes down the steps—a small, slightly built man in the early twenties, with a little moustache and a pallid face. Looking hard at the new-comer.*] Well, Hibbert?

HIBBERT. Everything's fairly quiet. Bit of sniping somewhere to our left; some rifle grenades coming over just on our right.

STANHOPE. I see. Mason's got your supper.

HIBBERT. [*Gently rubbing his forehead.*] I don't think I can manage any supper to-night, Stanhope. It's this beastly neuralgia. It seems to be right inside this eye. The beastly pain gets worse every day.

STANHOPE. Some hot soup and a good tough chop'll put that right.

HIBBERT. I'm afraid the pain rather takes my appetite away. I'm damn sorry to keep on talking about it, Stanhope, only I thought you'd wonder why I don't eat anything much.

STANHOPE. Try and forget about it.

HIBBERT. [*With a little laugh.*] Well—I wish I could.

STANHOPE. Get tight.

HIBBERT. I think I'll turn straight in for a rest—and try and get some sleep.

STANHOPE. All right. Turn in. You're in that dug-out there. Here's your pack. [*He picks up the pack that Trotter brought down.*] You go on duty at two. I take over from you at four. I'll tell Mason to call you.

HIBBERT. [*Faintly.*] Oh, right—thanks, Stanhope—cheero.

STANHOPE. Cheero.

[*He watches Hibbert go down the tunnel into the dark.*]

HIBBERT. [*Returning.*] Can I have a candle?

STANHOPE. [*Taking one from the table.*] Here you are.

HIBBERT. Thanks.

[*He goes out again. There is silence. Stanhope turns to Osborne.*]

STANHOPE. Another little worm trying to wriggle home.

OSBORNE. [*Filling his pipe.*] I wonder if he really is bad. He looks rotten.

STANHOPE. Pure bloody funk, that's all. He could eat if he

wanted to; he's starving himself purposely. Artful little swine! Neuralgia's a splendid idea. No proof, as far as I can see.

OSBORNE. You can't help feeling sorry for him. I think he's tried hard.

STANHOPE. How long's he been out here? Three months, I suppose. Now he's decided he's done his bit. He's decided to go home and spend the rest of the war in comfortable nerve hospitals. Well, he's mistaken. I let Warren get away like that, but no more.

OSBORNE. I don't see how you can prevent a fellow going sick.

STANHOPE. I'll have a quiet word with the doctor before *he* does. He thinks he's going to wriggle off before the attack. We'll just see about that. No man of mine's going sick before the attack. They're going to take an equal chance—together.

OSBORNE. Raleigh looks a nice chap.

STANHOPE. [*Looking hard at Osborne before replying.*] Yes.

OSBORNE. Good-looking youngster. At school with you, wasn't he?

STANHOPE. Has he been talking already?

OSBORNE. He just mentioned it. It was a natural thing to tell me when he knew you were in command. [*Stanhope is lounging at the table with his back to the wall. Osborne, sitting on the right-hand bed, begins to puff clouds of smoke into the air as he lights his pipe.*] He's awfully pleased to get into your company. [*Stanhope makes no reply. He picks up a pencil and scribbles on the back of a magazine.*] He seems to think a lot of you.

STANHOPE. [*Looking up quickly at Osborne and laughing.*] Yes, I'm his hero.

OSBORNE. It's quite natural.

STANHOPE. You think so?

OSBORNE. Small boys at school generally have their heroes.

STANHOPE. Yes. Small boys at school do.

OSBORNE. Often it goes on as long as——

STANHOPE. —as long as the hero's a hero.

OSBORNE. It often goes on all through life.

STANHOPE. I wonder. How many battalions are there in France?

OSBORNE. Why?

STANHOPE. We'll say fifty divisions. That's a hundred and fifty brigades—four hundred and fifty battalions. That's one thousand eight hundred companies. [*He looks up at*

*Osborne from his calculations on the magazine cover.]* There are one thousand eight hundred companies in France, uncle. Raleigh might have been sent to any one of those, and, my God! he comes to mine.

OSBORNE. You ought to be glad. He's a good-looking youngster. I like him.

STANHOPE. I knew you'd like him. Personality, isn't it? [*He takes a worn leather case from his breast pocket and hands a small photograph to Osborne.*] I've never shown you that, have I?

OSBORNE. [*Looking at the photograph.*] No. [*Pause.*] Raleigh's sister, isn't it?

STANHOPE. How did you know?

OSBORNE. There's a strong likeness.

STANHOPE. I suppose there is.

OSBORNE. [*Intent on the picture.*] She's an awfully nice-looking girl.

STANHOPE. A photo doesn't show much, really. Just a face.

OSBORNE. She looks awfully nice. [*There is silence. Stanhope lights a cigarette. Osborne hands the photo back.*] You're a lucky chap.

STANHOPE. [*Putting the photo back into his case.*] I don't know why I keep it, really.

OSBORNE. Why? Isn't she—I thought——

STANHOPE. What did you think?

OSBORNE. Well, I thought that perhaps she was waiting for you.

STANHOPE. Yes. She is waiting for me—and she doesn't know. She thinks I'm a wonderful chap—commanding a company.

[*He turns to Osborne and points up the steps into the line.*] She doesn't know that if I went up those steps into the front line—without being doped with whisky—I'd go mad with fright.

[*There is a pause. Osborne stirs himself to speak.*]

OSBORNE. Look here, old man. I've meant to say it, for a long time, but it sounds damned impudence. You've done longer out here than any man in the battalion. It's time you went away for a rest. It's due to you.

STANHOPE. You suggest that I go sick, like that little worm in there—neuralgia in the eye? [*He laughs and takes a drink.*]

OSBORNE. No. Not that. The colonel would have sent you down long ago, only——

STANHOPE. Only—what?

OSBORNE. Only he can't spare you.

STANHOPE. [*Laughing.*] Oh, rot!



OSBORNE. He told me.

STANHOPE. He thinks I'm in such a state I want a rest, is that it?

OSBORNE. No. He thinks it's due to you.

STANHOPE. It's all right, uncle. I'll stick it out now. It may not be much longer now. I've had my share of luck—more than my share. There's not a man left who was here when I came. But it's rather damnable for that boy—of all the boys in the world—to have come to *me*. I might at least have been spared that.

OSBORNE. You're looking at things in rather a black sort of way.

STANHOPE. I've just told you. That boy's a hero-worshipper. I'm three years older than he is. You know what that means at school. I was skipper of rugger and that all sort of thing. It doesn't sound much to a man out here—but it does at school with a kid of fourteen. Damn it, uncle, you're a schoolmaster; you know.

OSBORNE. I've just told you what I think of hero-worship.

STANHOPE. Raleigh's father knew mine, and I was told to keep an eye on the kid. I rather liked the idea of looking after him. I made him keen on the right things—and all that. His people asked me to stay with them one summer. I met his sister then——

OSBORNE. Yes?

STANHOPE. At first I thought of her as another kid like Raleigh. It was just before I came out here for the first time that I realized what a topping girl she was. Funny how you realize it suddenly. I just prayed to come through the war—and—and *do* things—and keep absolutely fit for her.

OSBORNE. You've done pretty well. An M.C. and a company.

STANHOPE. [*Taking another whisky.*] It was all right at first. When I went home on leave after six months it was jolly fine to feel I'd done a little to make her pleased. [*He takes a gulp of his drink.*] It was after I came back here—in that awful affair on Vimy Ridge. I knew I'd go mad if I didn't break the strain. I couldn't bear being fully conscious all the time—you've felt that, uncle, haven't you?

OSBORNE. Yes, often.

STANHOPE. There were only two ways of breaking the strain. One was pretending I was ill—and going home; the other was this. [*He holds up his glass.*] Which would you pick, uncle?

OSBORNE. I haven't been through as much as you. I don't know yet.

STANHOPE. I thought it all out. It's a slimy thing to go home if you're not really ill, isn't it?

OSBORNE. I think it is.

STANHOPE. Well, then. [*He holds his glass up to Osborne.*] Cheero, and long live the men who go home with neuralgia. [*He puts his glass down.*] I didn't go home on my last leave. I couldn't bear to meet her, in case she realized——

OSBORNE. When the war's over—and the strain's gone—you'll soon be as fit as ever, at your age.

STANHOPE. I've hoped that all the time. I'd go away for months and live in the open air—and get fit—and then go back to her.

OSBORNE. And so you can.

STANHOPE. If Raleigh had gone to one of those other one thousand eight hundred companies.

OSBORNE. I don't see why you should think——

STANHOPE. Oh, for Lord's sake don't be a damn fool. *You* know! You know he'll write and tell her I reek of whisky all day.

OSBORNE. Why should he? He's not a——

STANHOPE. Exactly. He's not a damned little swine who'd deceive his sister.

OSBORNE. He's very young; he's got hundreds of strange things to learn; he'll realize that men are—*different*—out here.

STANHOPE. It's no good, uncle. Didn't you see him sitting there at supper?—staring at me?—and wondering? He's up in those trenches now—still wondering—and beginning to understand. And all these months he's wanted to be with me out here. Poor little devil!

OSBORNE. I believe Raleigh'll go on liking you—and looking up to you—through everything. There's something very deep, and rather fine about hero-worship.

STANHOPE. Hero-worship be damned! [*He pauses, then goes on, in a strange, high-pitched voice.*] You know, uncle, I'm an awful fool. I'm *captain* of this company. What's the bloody little prig of a boy matter? D'you see? He's a little prig. Wants to write home and tell Madge all about *me*. Well, he won't; d'you see, uncle? He *won't* write. Censorship! I censor his letters—cross out all he says about me.

OSBORNE. You can't read his letters.

STANHOPE. [*Dreamily.*] Cross out all he says about me. Then we all go west in the big attack—and she goes on thinking I'm a fine fellow for ever—and ever—and ever.

*[He pours out a drink, murmuring 'Ever—and ever—and ever.'*

OSBORNE. *[Rising from his bed.]* It's not as bad as all that. Turn in and have a sleep.

STANHOPE. Sleep! Catch me wasting my time with sleep.

OSBORNE. *[Picking up Stanhope's pack and pulling out the blanket.]* Come along, old chap. You come and lie down here.

*[He puts the pack as a pillow on Stanhope's bed, and spreads out the blanket.]*

STANHOPE. *[With his chin in his hands.]* Little prig—that's what he is. Did I ask him to force his way into my company? No! I didn't. Very well, he'll pay for his damn cheek. *[Osborne lays his hand gently on Stanhope's shoulder to persuade him to lie down.]* Go away! *[He shakes Osborne's hand off.]* What the hell are you trying to do?

OSBORNE. Come and lie down and go to sleep.

STANHOPE. Go sleep y'self. I censor his letters, d'you see, uncle? You watch and see he doesn't smuggle any letters away.

OSBORNE. Righto. Now come and lie down. You've had a hard day of it.

STANHOPE. *[Looking up suddenly.]* Where's Hardy? D'you say he's gone?

OSBORNE. Yes. He's gone.

STANHOPE. Gone, has he? Y'know, I had a word to say to Master Hardy. He would go, the swine! Dirty trenches—everything dirty—I wanner tell him to keep his trenches clean.

OSBORNE. *[Standing beside Stanhope and putting his hand gently on his shoulder again.]* We'll clean them up to-morrow.

*[Stanhope looks up at Osborne and laughs gaily.]*

STANHOPE. Dear old uncle! Clean trenches up—with little dustpan and brush. *[He laughs.]* Make you little apron—with lace on it.

OSBORNE. That'll be fine. Now then, come along, old chap. I'll see you get called at two o'clock. *[He firmly takes Stanhope by the arm and draws him over to the bed.]* You must be tired.

STANHOPE. *[In a dull voice.]* God, I'm bloody tired; ache—all over—feel sick.

*[Osborne helps him on to the bed, takes the blanket and puts it over him.]*

OSBORNE. You'll feel all right in a minute. How's that? Comfortable?



STANHOPE. Yes. Comfortable. [*He looks up into Osborne's face and laughs again.*] Dear old uncle. Tuck me up.

[*Osborne fumbles the blankets round Stanhope.*]

OSBORNE. There we are.

STANHOPE. Kiss me, uncle.

OSBORNE. Kiss you be blowed! You go to sleep.

STANHOPE. [*Closing his eyes.*] Yes—I go sleep.

[*He turns slowly on to his side with his face to the earth wall.*]

[*Osborne stands watching for a while, then blows out the candle by Stanhope's bed. Stanhope gives a deep sigh, and begins to breathe heavily. Osborne goes to the servant's dug-out and calls softly :*]

OSBORNE. Mason!

MASON. [*Appearing with unbuttoned tunic at the tunnel entrance.*]  
Yessir?

OSBORNE. Will you call me at ten minutes to eleven—and Mr Hibbert at ten minutes to two? I'm going to turn in for a little while.

MASON. Very good, sir. [*Pause.*] The pepper's come, sir.

OSBORNE. Oh, good.

MASON. I'm very sorry about the pepper, sir.

OSBORNE. That's all right, Mason.

MASON. Good night, sir.

OSBORNE. Good night.

[*Mason leaves the dug-out. Osborne turns, and looks up the narrow steps into the night, where the Very lights rise and fade against the starlit sky. He glances once more at Stanhope, then crosses to his own bed, takes out from his tunic pocket a large, old-fashioned watch, and quietly winds it up. Through the stillness comes the low rumble of distant guns.*]

CURTAIN

## ACT II

### SCENE I

*Early next morning. A pale shaft of sunlight shines down the steps, but candles still burn in the dark corner where Osborne and Raleigh are at breakfast. Mason has put a large plate of bacon before each, and turns to go as Trotter comes down the steps, whistling gaily and rubbing his hands.*

TROTTER. What a lovely smell of bacon!

MASON. Yes, sir. I reckon there's enough smell of bacon in 'ere to last for dinner.

TROTTER. Well, there's nothing like a good fat bacon rasher when you're as empty as I am.

MASON. I'm glad you like it fat, sir.

TROTTER. Well, I like a bit o' lean, too.

MASON. There *was* a bit of lean in the middle of yours, sir, but it's kind of shrunk up in the cooking.

TROTTER. Bad cooking, that's all. Any porridge?

MASON. Oh, yes, sir. There's porridge.

TROTTER. Lumpy, I s'pose?

MASON. Yes, sir. Quite nice and lumpy.

TROTTER. Well, take the lumps out o' mine.

MASON. And just bring you the gravy, sir? Very good, sir.

*[Mason goes out. Trotter looks after him suspiciously.]*

TROTTER. You know, that man's getting familiar.

OSBORNE. He's not a bad cook.

*[Trotter has picked up his coffee mug, and is smelling it.]*

TROTTER. I say, d' you realize he's washed his dish-cloth?

OSBORNE. I know. I told him about it.

TROTTER. Did you really? You've got some pluck. 'Ow did you go about it?

OSBORNE. I wrote and asked my wife for a packet of Lux. Then I gave it to Mason and suggested he tried it on something.

TROTTER. Good man. No, he's not a bad cook. Might be a lot worse. When I was in the ranks we 'ad a prize cook—used to be a plumber before the war. Ought to 'ave seen the

stew 'e made. Thin! Thin wasn't the word. Put a bucketful of 'is stew in a bath and pull the plug, and the whole lot would go down in a couple of gurgles.

[*Mason brings Trotter's porridge.*]

MASON. I 've took the lumps out.

TROTTER. Good. Keep 'em and use 'em for dumplings next time we 'ave boiled beef.

MASON. Very good, sir.

[*He goes out.*]

TROTTER. Yes. That plumber was a prize cook, 'e was. Lucky for us one day 'e set 'imself on fire making the tea. 'E went 'ome pretty well fried. Did Mason get that pepper?

OSBORNE. Yes.

TROTTER. Good. Must 'ave pepper.

OSBORNE. I thought you were on duty now.

TROTTER. I 'm supposed to be. Stanhope sent me down to get my breakfast. He 's looking after things till I finish.

OSBORNE. He 's got a long job then.

TROTTER. Oh, no. I 'm a quick eater. Hi! Mason! Bacon!

MASON. [*Outside.*] Coming, sir!

OSBORNE. It 's a wonderful morning.

TROTTER. Isn't it lovely? Makes you feel sort of young and 'opeful. I was up in that old trench under the brick wall just now, and damned if a bloomin' little bird didn't start singing! Didn't 'arf sound funny. Sign of spring, I s'pose. [*Mason arrives with Trotter's bacon.*] That looks all right.

MASON. If you look down straight on it from above, sir, you can see the bit o' lean quite clear.

TROTTER. Good Lord, yes! That 's it, isn't it?

MASON. No, sir; that 's a bit o' rust off the pan.

TROTTER. Ah! *That* 's it, then!

MASON. You 've got it, sir.

[*He goes out.*]

TROTTER. Cut us a chunk of bread, uncle.

[*Osborne cuts him off a chunk.*]

OSBORNE. How are things going up there?

TROTTER. I don't like the look of things a bit.

OSBORNE. You mean—the quiet?

TROTTER. Yes. Standing up there in the dark last night there didn't seem a thing in the world alive—except the rats squeaking and my stomach grumbling about that cutlet.

OSBORNE. It 's quiet even now.

TROTTER. Too damn quiet. You can bet your boots the Boche is up to something. The big attack soon, I reckon. I don't like it, uncle. Pass the jam.



OSBORNE. It's strawberry.

TROTTER. Is it? I'm glad we've got rid o' that raspberry jam. Can't stand raspberry jam. Pips get be'ind your plate.

OSBORNE. Did Stanhope tell you he wants two wiring parties out to-night?

TROTTER. Yes. He's fixing it up now. [*He pauses, and goes on in a low voice.*] My goodness, uncle, doesn't he look ill!

OSBORNE. I'm afraid he's not well.

TROTTER. Nobody'd be well who went on like he does. [*There is another pause.*] You know when you came up to relieve me last night?

OSBORNE. Yes?

TROTTER. Well, Raleigh and me came back here, and there was Stanhope sitting on that bed drinking a whisky. He looked as white as a sheet. God, he looked awful; he'd drunk the bottle since dinner. I said, "Ullo!" and he didn't seem to know who I was. Uncanny, wasn't it, Raleigh?

RALEIGH. [*With lowered head.*] Yes.

TROTTER. He just said, 'Better go to bed, Raleigh'—just as if Raleigh'd been a school kid.

OSBORNE. Did he? [*There is a pause.*] Look at the sun. It'll be quite warm soon.

[*They look at the pale square of sunlight on the floor.*]

TROTTER. It's warm now. You can feel it on your face outside if you stand in it. First time this year. 'Ope we've an 'ot summer.

OSBORNE. So do I.

TROTTER. Funny about that bird. Made me feel quite braced up. Sort of made me think about my garden of an evening—walking round in me slippers after supper, smoking me pipe.

OSBORNE. You keen on gardening?

TROTTER. Oh, I used to do a bit of an evening. I 'ad a decent little grass plot in front, with flower-borders—geraniums, lobelia, and calceolaria—you know, red, white, and blue. Looked rather nice in the summer.

OSBORNE. Yes.

TROTTER. 'Ad some fine 'olly'ocks out the back. One year I 'ad one eight feet 'igh. Took a photer of it. [*He fumbles in his pocket case.*] Like to look at it?

OSBORNE. I would. [*He looks at the photo.*] By Jove, it's a beauty.

TROTTER. [*Looking over Osborne's shoulder.*] You see that, just there?

OSBORNE. Yes?

TROTTER. That 's the roof of the summer-'ouse.

OSBORNE. Is it really!

TROTTER. Just shows the 'ite of the 'olly'ock.

OSBORNE. It does. [*He shows the photo to Raleigh.*] A beauty, isn't it?

RALEIGH. Rather!

TROTTER. It never wanted no stick to keep it straight, neether. [*There is a pause.*] You keen on gardening?

OSBORNE. Yes. A bit. I made a rockery when I was home on leave. I used to cycle out to the woods and get primroses and things like that, and try and get 'em to grow in my garden.

TROTTER. I don't suppose they would!

OSBORNE. They would if you pressed a bit of moss round them——

TROTTER. —to make 'em feel at 'ome, eh? [*He laughs.*]

OSBORNE. They 'll be coming out again soon if they 've got this sun at home.

TROTTER. I reckon they will. I remember one morning last spring—we was coming out of the salient. Just when it was getting light in the morning—it was at the time when the Boche was sending over a lot of that gas that smells like pear-drops, you know?

OSBORNE. I know. Phosgene.

TROTTER. That 's it. We were scared to hell of it. All of a sudden we smelt that funny sweet smell, and a fellow shouted 'Gas!'—and we put on our masks; and then I spotted what it was.

OSBORNE. What was it?

TROTTER. Why, a blinkin' may-tree! All out in bloom, growing beside the path! We did feel a lot of silly poops—putting on gas masks because of a damn may-tree! [*He stretches himself and tries to button his tunic.*] Lord! I *must* get my fat down. [*He gets up.*] Well, I better go and relieve Stanhope. He 'll curse like hell if I don't. I bet he 's got a red-hot liver this morning.

OSBORNE. I relieve you at eleven.

TROTTER. That 's right. I don't like this time of day in the line. The old Boche 'as just 'ad 'is breakfast, and sends over a few whizz-bangs and rifle grenades to show 'e ain't forgotten us. Still, I 'd rather 'ave a bang or two than this damn quiet.

[*He puts on his helmet and gas mask satchel and goes up the steps.*] Cheero!

OSBORNE. Cheero!

RALEIGH. Cheero!

OSBORNE. [*To Raleigh.*] I expect Stanhope 'll let you go on duty alone now.

RALEIGH. Will he? About what time?

OSBORNE. Well, after me, I expect. From about two till four.

RALEIGH. I see.

[*There is a pause. Then Osborne looks at Raleigh and laughs.*]

OSBORNE. What do you think about it all?

RALEIGH. Oh, all right, thanks. [*He laughs.*] I feel I've been here ages.

OSBORNE. [*Filling his pipe.*] I expect you do. The time passes, though.

RALEIGH. Are we here for six days?

OSBORNE. Yes. Seems a long time, doesn't it?

RALEIGH. [*Laughing shortly.*] It does rather. I can't imagine—the end of six days here——

OSBORNE. Anyhow, we've done twelve hours already. It's fine when you are relieved and go down the line to billets, and have a good hot bath, and sit and read under trees.

RALEIGH. Good Lord, I feel I haven't seen a tree for ages—not a real tree, with leaves and branches—and yet I've only been here twelve hours.

OSBORNE. How did you feel—in the front line?

RALEIGH. Oh, all right. It seemed so frightfully quiet and uncanny—everybody creeping about and talking in low voices. I suppose you've got to talk quietly when you're so near the German front line—only about seventy yards, isn't it?

OSBORNE. Yes. About the breadth of a rugger field.

RALEIGH. It's funny to think of it like that.

OSBORNE. I always measure distances like that out here. Keeps them in proportion.

RALEIGH. Did you play rugger?

OSBORNE. Yes. But mostly reffing at school in the last few years.

RALEIGH. Are you a schoolmaster, then?

OSBORNE. Yes. I must apologize.

RALEIGH. Oh, I don't mind schoolmasters. [*Hastily.*] I—I—mean, I never met one outside a school.

OSBORNE. They do get out sometimes.

RALEIGH. [*Laughing.*] Who did you play for?



OSBORNE. The Harlequins.

RALEIGH. I say, really!

OSBORNE. I played for the English team on one great occasion.

RALEIGH. What! For *England*.

OSBORNE. I was awfully lucky to get the chance. It's a long time ago now.

RALEIGH. [*With awe.*] Oh, but, good Lord! that must have been simply topping. Where did you play?

OSBORNE. Wing three.

RALEIGH. I say, I—I never realized—you'd played for England.

OSBORNE. Tuppence to talk to me now! Anyhow, don't breeze it about.

RALEIGH. Don't the others know?

OSBORNE. We never talk about rugger.

RALEIGH. They ought to know. It'd make them feel jolly bucked.

OSBORNE. [*Laughing.*] It doesn't make much difference out here!

RALEIGH. It must be awfully thrilling, playing in front of a huge crowd—all shouting and cheering——

OSBORNE. You don't notice it when the game begins.

RALEIGH. You're too taken up with the game?

OSBORNE. Yes.

RALEIGH. I used to get wind up playing at school with only a few kids looking on.

OSBORNE. You feel it more when there are only a few. [*He has picked up a slip of paper from the table; suddenly he laughs.*] Look at this!

RALEIGH. [*Looking at it curiously.*] What is it?

OSBORNE. Trotter's plan to make the time pass quickly. One hundred and forty-four little circles—one for each hour of six days. He's blacked in six already. He's six hours behind.

RALEIGH. It's rather a good idea. I like Trotter.

OSBORNE. He's a good chap.

RALEIGH. He makes things feel—natural.

OSBORNE. He's a genuine sort of chap.

RALEIGH. That's it. He's genuine. [*There is a pause. He has been filling a new pipe. Osborne is puffing at his old one.*] How topping—to have played for England!

OSBORNE. It was rather fun.

RALEIGH. [*After a pause.*] The Germans are really quite decent, aren't they? I mean, outside the newspapers?

OSBORNE. Yes. [*Pause.*] I remember up at Wipers we had a

man shot when he was out on patrol. Just at dawn. We couldn't get him in that night. He lay out there groaning all day. Next night three of our men crawled out to get him in. It was so near the German trenches that they could have shot our fellows one by one. But, when our men began dragging the wounded man back over the rough ground, a big German officer stood up in their trenches and called out: 'Carry him!'—and our fellows stood up and carried the man back, and the German officer fired some lights for them to see by.

RALEIGH. How topping!

OSBORNE. Next day we blew each other's trenches to blazes.

RALEIGH. It all seems rather—*silly*, doesn't it?

OSBORNE. It does, rather. *[There is silence for a while.]*

RALEIGH. I started a letter when I came off duty last night. How do we send letters?

OSBORNE. The quartermaster-sergeant takes them down after he brings rations up in the evenings.

*[Stanhope is coming slowly down the steps. Raleigh rises.]*

RALEIGH. I think I'll go and finish it now—if I go on duty soon.

OSBORNE. Come and write it in here. It's more cheery.

RALEIGH. It's all right thanks; I'm quite comfortable in there. I've rigged up a sort of little table beside my bed.

OSBORNE. Righto.

*[Raleigh goes into his dug-out. Stanhope is slowly taking off his equipment.]*

STANHOPE. What a foul smell of bacon.

OSBORNE. Yes. We've got bacon for breakfast.

STANHOPE. So I gather. Have you told Raleigh about rifle inspection?

OSBORNE. No.

STANHOPE. *[At the entrance to Raleigh's dug-out.]* Raleigh!

RALEIGH. *[Appearing.]* Yes?

STANHOPE. You inspect your platoon's rifles at nine o'clock.

RALEIGH. Oh, righto, Stanhope. *[He goes again.]*

STANHOPE. *[Sitting at the table.]* I've arranged two wiring parties to begin at eight o'clock to-night—Corporal Burt with two men and Sergeant Smith with two. I want them to strengthen the wire all along the front.

OSBORNE. It's very weak at present.

STANHOPE. Every company leaves it for the next one to do. There're great holes blown out weeks ago.

OSBORNE. I know.

STANHOPE. Next night we 'll start putting a belt of wire down both sides of us.

OSBORNE. Down the sides?

STANHOPE. Yes. We 'll wire ourselves right in. If this attack comes I 'm not going to trust the companies on our sides to hold their ground.

*[Mason has come in, and stands diffidently in the background.]*

MASON. Would you like a nice bit o' bacon, sir?

STANHOPE. No, thanks. I 'll have a cup of tea.

MASON. Right, sir.

*[He goes out.]*

STANHOPE. I 've been having a good look round. We 've got a strong position here—if we wire ourselves right in. The colonel 's been talking to me up there.

OSBORNE. Oh. Has he been round?

STANHOPE. Yes. He says a German prisoner gave the day of attack as the 21st.

OSBORNE. That 's Thursday?

STANHOPE. Yes. To-day 's Tuesday.

OSBORNE. That means about dawn the day after to-morrow.

STANHOPE. The second dawn from now. *[There is a pause.]*

OSBORNE. Then it 'll come while we 're here.

STANHOPE. Yes. It 'll come while we 're here. And we shall be in the front row of the stalls.

OSBORNE. Oh, well——

*[In the silence that follows, Mason enters with a cup of tea.]*

MASON. Would you like a nice plate of sardines, sir?

STANHOPE. I should loathe it.

MASON. Very good, sir.

*[He goes out.]*

OSBORNE. Did the colonel have much to say?

STANHOPE. Only that when the attack comes we can't expect any help from behind. We 're not to move from here. We 've got to stick it.

OSBORNE. I see.

STANHOPE. We 'll wire ourselves in as strongly as possible. I 've got to arrange battle positions for each platoon and section this afternoon.

OSBORNE. Well, I 'm glad it 's coming at last. I 'm sick of waiting.

STANHOPE. *[Looking at Trotter's chart.]* What 's this extraordinary affair?

OSBORNE. Trotter's plan to make the time pass by. A hundred and forty-four circles—one for each hour of six days.

STANHOPE. How many hours are there till dawn on the 21st?



OSBORNE. Goodness knows. Not many, I hope.

STANHOPE. Nearly nine o'clock now. Twenty-four till nine to-morrow; twelve till nine at night—that's thirty-six; nine till six next morning; that's forty-five altogether.

*[He begins to count off forty-five circles on Trotter's chart.]*

OSBORNE. What are you going to do?

STANHOPE. At the end of the forty-fifth circle I'm going to draw a picture of Trotter being blown up in four pieces.

OSBORNE. Don't spoil his chart. It took him an hour to make that.

STANHOPE. He won't see the point. He's no imagination.

OSBORNE. I don't suppose he has.

STANHOPE. Funny not to have any imagination. Must be rather nice.

OSBORNE. A bit dull, I should think.

STANHOPE. It must be, rather. I suppose all his life Trotter feels like you and I do when we're drowsily drunk.

OSBORNE. Poor chap!

STANHOPE. I suppose if Trotter looks at that wall he just sees a brown surface. He doesn't see into the earth beyond—the worms wandering about round the stones and roots of trees. I wonder how a worm knows when it's going up or down.

OSBORNE. When it's going down I suppose the blood runs into its head and makes it throb.

STANHOPE. Worms haven't got any blood.

OSBORNE. Then I don't suppose it ever does know.

STANHOPE. Rotten if it didn't—and went on going down when it thought it was coming up.

OSBORNE. Yes. I expect that's the one thing worms dread.

STANHOPE. D'you think this life sharpens the imagination?

OSBORNE. It must.

STANHOPE. Whenever I look at anything nowadays I see right through it. Looking at you now there's your uniform—your jersey—shirt—vest—then beyond that—

OSBORNE. Let's talk about something else—croquet, or the war.

STANHOPE. *[Laughing.]* Sorry! It's a habit that's grown on me lately—to look right through things, and on and on—till I get frightened and stop.

OSBORNE. I suppose everybody out here—*feels* more keenly.

STANHOPE. I hope so. I wondered if there was anything wrong with me. D'you ever get a sudden feeling that everything's

going farther and farther away—till you're the only thing in the world—and then the world begins going away—until you're the only thing in—in the universe—and you struggle to get back—and can't?

OSBORNE. Bit of nerve strain, that's all.

STANHOPE. You don't think I'm going potty?

OSBORNE. Oh, Lord, no!

STANHOPE. [*Throwing back his head and laughing.*] Dear old uncle! you don't really know, do you? You just pretend you do, to make me feel all right.

OSBORNE. When people are going potty they never talk about it; they keep it to themselves.

STANHOPE. Oh, well, that's all right, then. [*There is silence for a while.*] I had that feeling this morning, standing out there in the line while the sun was rising. By the way, did you see the sunrise? Wasn't it gorgeous?

OSBORNE. Splendid—this morning.

STANHOPE. I was looking across at the Boche trenches and right beyond—not a sound or a soul; just an enormous plain, all churned up like a sea that's got muddier and muddier till it's so stiff that it can't move. You could have heard a pin drop in the quiet; yet you knew thousands of guns were hidden there, all ready cleaned and oiled—millions of bullets lying in pouches—thousands of Germans, waiting and thinking. Then, gradually, that feeling came——

OSBORNE. I never knew the sun could rise in so many ways till I came out here. Green, and pink, and red, and blue, and grey. Extraordinary, isn't it?

STANHOPE. Yes. Hi! Mason!

MASON. [*Outside.*] Yessir!

STANHOPE. Bring some mugs and a bottle of whisky.

MASON. Yessir.

OSBORNE. [*Smiling.*] So early in the morning?

STANHOPE. Just a spot. It's damn cold in here.

OSBORNE. [*Turning over the pages of a magazine.*] This show at the Hippodrome has been running a long time.

STANHOPE. What? *Zig-zag*?

OSBORNE. Yes. George Robey's in it.

STANHOPE. Harper saw it on leave. Says it's damn good. Robey's pricelessly funny.

[*Mason brings whisky and mugs and water.*]

OSBORNE. Wish I'd seen a show on leave.

STANHOPE. D'you mean to say you didn't go to any shows?

OSBORNE. [*Laughing.*] No. I spent all the time in the garden, making a rockery. In the evenings I used to sit and smoke and read—and my wife used to knit socks and play the piano a bit. We pretended there wasn't any war at all—till my two youngsters made me help in a tin-soldier battle on the floor.

STANHOPE. Poor old uncle! You can't get away from it, can you?

OSBORNE. I wish I knew how to fight a battle like those boys of mine. You ought to have seen the way they lured my men under the sofa and mowed them down.

STANHOPE. [*Laughing and helping himself to a drink.*] You going to have one?

OSBORNE. Not now, thanks.

STANHOPE. You go on duty at eleven, don't you?

OSBORNE. Yes. I relieve Trotter.

STANHOPE. Raleigh better go on at one o'clock and stay with you for an hour. Then he can stay on alone till four. Hibbert relieves him at four.

OSBORNE. Righto.

STANHOPE. What's Raleigh doing now?

OSBORNE. Finishing a letter.

STANHOPE. Did you tell him?

OSBORNE. About what?

STANHOPE. Censorship.

OSBORNE. You don't mean that seriously?

STANHOPE. Mean it? Of course I mean it.

OSBORNE. You can't do that.

STANHOPE. Officially I'm supposed to read all your letters. Damn it all, uncle! Imagine yourself in my place—a letter going away from here—from that boy——

OSBORNE. He'll say nothing—rotten—about you.

STANHOPE. You think so? [*There is a pause.*] I heard you go on duty last night. After you'd gone, I got up. I was feeling bad. I forgot Raleigh was out there with Trotter. I'd forgotten all about him. I was sleepy. I just knew something beastly had happened. Then he came in with Trotter—and looked at me. After coming in out of the night air, this place must have reeked of candle-grease, and rats—and whisky. One thing a boy like that can't stand is a smell that isn't fresh. He looked at me as if I'd hit him between the eyes—as if I'd spat on him——

OSBORNE. You imagine things.



STANHOPE. [*Laughing.*] Imagine things! No need to imagine!

OSBORNE. Why can't you treat him like any other youngster?

[*Raleigh comes in from his dug-out with a letter in his hand. He stops short as he notices the abrupt silence that follows his entry.*]

RALEIGH. I'm sorry.

OSBORNE. It's all right, Raleigh. Going to inspect rifles?

RALEIGH. Yes.

OSBORNE. You needn't bother if the wood's a bit dirty—just the barrels and magazines and all the metal parts.

RALEIGH. Righto.

OSBORNE. See there's plenty of oil on it. And look at the ammunition in the men's pouches.

RALEIGH. Right. [*He crosses towards the door and turns.*] Where do we put the letters to be collected?

OSBORNE. Oh, just on the table.

RALEIGH. Thanks. [*He begins to lick the flap of the envelope.*]

STANHOPE. [*In a quiet voice.*] You leave it open.

RALEIGH. [*Surprised.*] Open?

STANHOPE. Yes. I have to censor all letters.

RALEIGH. [*Stammering.*] Oh, but—I haven't said anything about—where we are——

STANHOPE. It's the rule that letters must be read.

RALEIGH. [*Nervously.*] Oh, I—I didn't realize that. [*He stands embarrassed; then gives a short laugh.*] I—I think—I'll just leave it, then.

[*He unbuttons his tunic to put the letter away. Stanhope rises, slowly crosses and faces Raleigh.*]

STANHOPE. Give me that letter!

RALEIGH. [*Astonished.*] But—Dennis——

STANHOPE. [*Trembling.*] Give me that letter!

RALEIGH. But it's—it's private. I didn't know——

STANHOPE. D'you understand an order? Give me that letter!

RALEIGH. But I tell you—there's nothing—— [*Stanhope clutches Raleigh's wrist and tears the letter from his hand.*]  
Dennis—I'm——

STANHOPE. Don't 'Dennis' me! Stanhope's my name! You're not at school! Go and inspect your rifles. [*Raleigh stands in amazement at the foot of the steps. Shouting.*] D'you understand an order?

[*For a moment Raleigh stares wide-eyed at Stanhope, who is trembling and breathing heavily, then almost in a whisper*]

*he says : 'Right,' and goes quietly up the narrow steps. Stanhope turns towards the table.*

OSBORNE. Good heavens, Stanhope!

STANHOPE. [*Wheeling furiously on Osborne.*] Look here, Osborne, I'm commanding this company. I ask for advice when I want it!

OSBORNE. Very well.

*[Stanhope sinks down at the table with the letter in his hand. There is silence for a moment. Then he throws the letter on the table and rests his head between his hands.]*

STANHOPE. Oh, God! I don't want to read the blasted thing!

OSBORNE. You'll let it go, then?

STANHOPE. I don't care. *[There is a pause.]*

OSBORNE. Shall I glance through it—for you?

STANHOPE. If you like.

OSBORNE. I don't *want* to.

STANHOPE. You better. I can't.

*[Osborne takes the letter from the table and opens it. Stanhope sits with his head in his hand, digging a magazine with a pencil. After a while, Osborne glances up at Stanhope.]*

OSBORNE. D' you want to hear?

STANHOPE. I suppose I better know.

OSBORNE. He begins with a description of his getting here—he doesn't mention the names of any places.

STANHOPE. What does he say then?

OSBORNE. The last piece is about you.

STANHOPE. Go on.

OSBORNE. [*Reading*] He says: 'And now I come to the great news. I reported at Battalion Headquarters, and the colonel looked in a little book, and said, "You report to 'C' Company—Captain Stanhope." Can't you imagine what I felt? I was taken along some trenches and shown a dug-out. There was an awfully nice officer there—quite old—with grey hair'—*[Osborne clears his throat]*—'and then later Dennis came in. He looked tired, but that's because he works so frightfully hard, and because of the responsibility. Then I went on duty in the front line, and a sergeant told me all about Dennis. He said that Dennis is the finest officer in the battalion, and the men simply love him. He hardly ever sleeps in the dug-out; he's always up in the front line with the men, cheering them on with jokes, and making them keen about things, like he did the kids at school. I'm awfully proud to think he's my

friend.' [*There is silence, Stanhope has not moved while Osborne has read.*] That's all. [*Pause.*] Shall I stick it down?

[*Stanhope sits with lowered head. He murmurs something that sounds like 'Yes, please.' He rises heavily and crosses to the shadows by Osborne's bed. The sun is shining quite brightly in the trench outside.*]

## CURTAIN

## SCENE II

*Afternoon on the same day. The sunlight has gone from the dug-out floor, but still shines brightly in the trench. Stanhope is lying on his bed reading by the light of a candle on the table beside him. A burly figure comes groping down the steps and stands blinking in the shadows of the dug-out. A huge man, with a heavy black moustache, a fat red face, and massive chin. Stanhope puts the magazine down, rises, and sits up to the table.*

STANHOPE. I want to talk with you, sergeant-major.

SERGEANT-MAJOR. [*Standing stolidly by the steps.*] Yes, sir?

STANHOPE. Sit down. Have a whisky?

S.-M. [*A suspicion of brightness in his voice.*] Thank you, sir.

[*The Sergeant-Major diffidently takes a small tot.*]

STANHOPE. I say. You won't taste that. Take a proper one.

S.-M. Well—sir—— [*Stanhope reaches over, helps the Sergeant-Major to a large tot, and takes one himself.*] Turning chilly again, sir. Quite warm this morning.

STANHOPE. Yes.

S.-M. Well, here's your very good health, sir.

[*He raises his glass and drinks.*]

STANHOPE. Cheero. [*He puts down his glass and abruptly changes his tone.*] Now, look here, sergeant-major. We must expect this attack on Thursday morning, at dawn. That's the second dawn from now.

[*The Sergeant-Major takes a very dirty little note-book from his pocket and jots down notes with a very small stub of pencil.*]

S.-M. Thursday morning. Very good, sir.

STANHOPE. We're to hold these trenches, and no man's to move from here.



S.-M. Very good, sir.

STANHOPE. It may happen that companies on our sides will give way, leaving our flanks exposed; so I want a screen of wire put down both flanks till it meets the wire in the support line.

S.-M. [*Writing hurriedly.*] Both flanks—yes, sir.

STANHOPE. When the attack begins, I shall take charge of the left, and Mr Osborne the right. You will be with Mr Osborne, and Sergeant Baker with me; 9 and 10 Platoons will move over here [*he points out the position on the trench map*]; 11 and 12 Platoons to the left.

S.-M. I see, sir.

STANHOPE. Is there anything you're not clear about?

S.-M. [*Looking at his notes.*] Seems all clear, sir.

STANHOPE. Anything you want to know?

S.-M. Well, sir—[*clears his throat*—when the attack comes, of course, we beat 'em off—but what if they keep on attacking?

STANHOPE. Then we keep on beating them off.

S.-M. Yes, sir. But what I mean is—they're bound to make a big thing of it.

STANHOPE. [*Cheerily.*] Oh, I think they will!

S.-M. Well, then, sir. If they don't get through the first day, they'll attack the next day and the next——

STANHOPE. They're bound to.

S.-M. Then oughtn't we to fix up something about, well—[*he gropes for the right words*]—er—falling back?

STANHOPE. There's no need to—you see, this company's a lot better than 'A' and 'B' Companies on either side of us.

S.-M. Quite, sir.

STANHOPE. Well, then, if any one breaks, 'A' and 'B' will break before we do. As long as we stick here when the other companies have given way, we can fire into the Boche as they try and get through the gaps on our sides—we'll make a hell of a mess of them. We might delay the advance a whole day.

S.-M. [*Diffidently.*] Yes, sir, but what 'appens when the Boche 'as all got round the back of us?

STANHOPE. Then we advance and win the war.

S.-M. [*Pretending to make a note.*] Win the war. Very good, sir.

STANHOPE. But you understand exactly what I mean, sergeant-major. Our orders are to stick here. If you're told to stick where you are you don't make plans to retire.

S.-M. Quite, sir.

[*Osborne's voice is calling down the steps. The Sergeant-Major rises.*]

OSBORNE. Are you there, Stanhope?

STANHOPE. [*Rising quickly.*] Yes. What's the matter?

OSBORNE. The colonel's up here. Wants to see you——

STANHOPE. Oh, right, I'll come up.

COLONEL. [*From above.*] All right, Stanhope—I'll come down.

S.-M. [*Who has risen.*] Anything more, sir?

STANHOPE. I don't think so. I'll see you at stand-to this evening.

S.-M. Very good, sir.

[*He stands back a pace and salutes Stanhope smartly. Stanhope's eye falls on the Sergeant-Major's nearly finished drink on the table. He points to it.*]

STANHOPE. Hoy! What about that?

S.-M. Thank you, sir.

[*He finishes the drink. The Colonel comes down the steps.*]

COLONEL. Good morning, sergeant-major.

S.-M. Good morning, sir. [*The Sergeant-Major goes up the steps.*]

STANHOPE. Hallo, sir!

COLONEL. Hallo, Stanhope! [*He sniffs.*] Strong smell of bacon.

STANHOPE. Yes, sir. We had some bacon for breakfast.

COLONEL. Hangs about, doesn't it?

STANHOPE. Yes, sir. Clings to the walls.

COLONEL. Lovely day.

STANHOPE. Splendid, sir.

COLONEL. Spring's coming. [*There is a pause.*] I'm glad you're alone. I've got some rather serious news.

STANHOPE. I'm sorry to hear that, sir. Will you have a drink?

COLONEL. Well, thanks—just a spot. [*Stanhope mixes a drink for the Colonel and himself.*] Here's luck.

STANHOPE. Cheero, sir. [*Bringing forward a box.*] Sit down, sir.

COLONEL. Thanks.

STANHOPE. What's the news, sir?

COLONEL. The brigadier came to see me this morning. [*He pauses.*] It seems almost certain the attack's to come on Thursday morning. They've got information from more than one source—but they don't know where it's going to fall the hardest. The Boche began relieving his front-line troops yesterday. They're bound to put in certain regiments where they intend to make the hardest push——

STANHOPE. Naturally——

COLONEL. And the general wants us to make a raid to find out who's come into the line opposite here.

[*There is a pause.*]

STANHOPE. I see. When?

COLONEL. As soon as possible. He said to-night.

STANHOPE. Oh, but that's absurd!

COLONEL. I told him so. I said the earliest would be to-morrow afternoon. A surprise daylight raid under a smoke screen from the trench-mortar people. I think daylight best. There's not much moon now, and it's vitally important to get hold of a Boche or two.

STANHOPE. Quite.

COLONEL. I suggest sending two officers and ten men. Quite enough for the purpose. Just opposite here there's only seventy yards of No Man's Land. To-night the trench-mortars can blow a hole in the Boche wire and you can cut a hole in yours. Harrison of the trench-mortars is coming in to dinner with me this evening to discuss everything. I'd like you to come too. Eight o'clock suit you?

STANHOPE. Very good, sir.

COLONEL. I'll leave you to select the men.

STANHOPE. You want me to go with them, sir?

COLONEL. Oh, no, Stanhope. I—I can't let you go. No. I want one officer to direct the raid and one to make the dash in and collar some Boche.

STANHOPE. Who do you suggest, sir?

COLONEL. Well, I suggest Osborne, for one. He's a very level-headed chap. He can direct it.

STANHOPE. And who else?

COLONEL. Well, there's Trotter—but he's a bit fat, isn't he? Not much good at dashing in?

STANHOPE. No. D'you suggest Hibbert?

COLONEL. Well, what do *you* think of Hibbert?

STANHOPE. I don't think so.

COLONEL. No.

*[There is a pause.]*

STANHOPE. Why not send a good sergeant, sir?

COLONEL. No. I don't think a sergeant. The men expect officers to lead a raid.

STANHOPE. Yes. There is that.

COLONEL. As a matter of fact, Stanhope, I'm thinking of that youngster I sent up to you last night.

STANHOPE. Raleigh?

COLONEL. Yes. Just the type. Plenty of guts——

STANHOPE. He's awfully new to it all——

COLONEL. All to the good. His nerves are sound.

STANHOPE. It's rotten to send a fellow who's only just arrived.



COLONEL. Well, who else is there? I could send an officer from another company——

STANHOPE. [*Quickly.*] Oh, Lord, no. We'll do it.

COLONEL. Then I suggest Osborne to direct the raid and Raleigh to make the dash—with ten good men. We'll meet Harrison and arrange the smoke bombs—and blowing a hole in the wire. You select the men and talk to Osborne and Raleigh about it in the meantime.

STANHOPE. Very well, sir.

COLONEL. Better send Osborne and Raleigh down to me in the morning to talk things over. Or, better still!—I'll come up here first thing to-morrow morning.

STANHOPE. Right, sir.

COLONEL. It's all a damn nuisance; but, after all—it's necessary.

STANHOPE. I suppose it is.

COLONEL. Well, so long, Stanhope. I'll see you at eight o'clock. Do you like fish?

STANHOPE. Fish, sir?

COLONEL. Yes. We've had some fresh fish sent up from rail-head for supper to-night.

STANHOPE. Splendid, sir!

COLONEL. Whiting, I think it is.

STANHOPE. Good!

COLONEL. Well, bye-bye.

*[The Colonel goes up the steps. Stanhope stands watching for a moment, then turns and walks slowly to the table. Hibbert comes quietly into the dug-out from the tunnel leading from his sleeping quarters.]*

STANHOPE. Hallo! I thought you were asleep.

HIBBERT. I just wanted a word with you, Stanhope.

STANHOPE. Fire away.

HIBBERT. This neuralgia of mine. I'm awfully sorry. I'm afraid I can't stick it any longer——

STANHOPE. I know. It's rotten, isn't it? I've got it like hell——

HIBBERT. [*Taken aback.*] You have?

STANHOPE. Had it for weeks.

HIBBERT. Well, I'm sorry, Stanhope. It's no good. I've tried damned hard; but I must go down——

STANHOPE. Go down—where?

HIBBERT. Why, go sick—go down the line. I must go into hospital and have some kind of treatment. [*There is a silence*

*for a moment. Stanhope is looking at Hibbert—till Hibbert turns away and walks towards his dug-out. I'll go right along now, I think——*

STANHOPE. [*Quietly.*] You're going to stay here.

HIBBERT. I'm going down to see the doctor. He'll send me to hospital when he understands——

STANHOPE. I've seen the doctor. I saw him this morning. He won't send you to hospital, Hibbert; he'll send you back here. He promised me he would. [*There is silence.*] So you can save yourself a walk.

HIBBERT. [*Fiercely.*] What the hell——!

STANHOPE. Stop that!

HIBBERT. I've a perfect right to go sick if I want to. The men can—why can't an officer?

STANHOPE. No man's sent down unless he's very ill. There's nothing wrong with you, Hibbert. The German attack's on Thursday; almost for certain. You're going to stay here and see it through with the rest of us.

HIBBERT. [*Hysterically.*] I tell you, I *can't*—the pain's nearly sending me mad. I'm going! I've got all my stuff packed. I'm going now—you can't stop me!

*[He goes excitedly into the dug-out. Stanhope walks slowly towards the steps, turns, and undoes the flap of his revolver holster. He takes out his revolver, and stands casually examining it. Hibbert returns with his pack slung on his back and a walking-stick in his hand. He pauses at the sight of Stanhope by the steps.]*

HIBBERT. Let's get by, Stanhope.

STANHOPE. You're going to stay here and do your job.

HIBBERT. Haven't I *told* you? I *can't*! Don't you understand? Let—let me get by.

STANHOPE. Now look here, Hibbert. I've got a lot of work to do and no time to waste. Once and for all, you're going to stay here and see it through with the rest of us.

HIBBERT. I shall die of this pain if I don't go!

STANHOPE. Better die of the pain than be shot for deserting.

HIBBERT. [*In a low voice.*] What do you mean?

STANHOPE. You know what I mean——

HIBBERT. I've a right to see the doctor!

STANHOPE. Good God! Don't you understand!—he'll send you back here. Dr Preston's never let a shirker pass him yet—and he's not going to start now—two days before the attack——

HIBBERT. [*Pleadingly.*] Stanhope—if you only *knew* how awful I feel—— Please do let me go by——

[*He walks slowly round behind Stanhope. Stanhope turns and thrusts him roughly back. With a lightning movement Hibbert raises his stick and strikes blindly at Stanhope, who catches the stick, tears it from Hibbert's hands, smashes it across his knee, and throws it on the ground.*

STANHOPE. God!—you little swine. You know what that means—don't you? Striking a superior officer! [*There is silence. Stanhope takes hold of his revolver as it swings from its lanyard. Hibbert stands quivering in front of Stanhope.*] Never mind, though. I won't have you shot for that——

HIBBERT. Let me go——

STANHOPE. If you went, I'd have you shot—for deserting. It's a hell of a disgrace—to die like that. I'd rather spare you the disgrace. I give you half a minute to think. You either stay here and try and be a man—or you try to get out of that door—to desert. If you do that, there's going to be an accident. D'you understand? I'm fiddling with my revolver, d'you see?—cleaning it—and it's going off by accident. It often happens out here. It's going off, and it's going to shoot you between the eyes.

HIBBERT. [*In a whisper.*] You daren't——

STANHOPE. You don't deserve to be shot by accident—but I'd save you the disgrace of the other way—I give you half a minute to decide. [*He holds up his wrist to look at his watch.*] Half a minute from now——

[*There is silence; a few seconds go by. Suddenly Hibbert bursts into a high-pitched laugh.*

HIBBERT. Go on, then, shoot! You won't let me go to hospital. I swear I'll never go into those trenches again. Shoot!—and thank God——

STANHOPE. [*With his eyes on his watch.*] Fifteen more seconds——

HIBBERT. Go on! I'm ready——

STANHOPE. Ten. [*He looks up at Hibbert, who has closed his eyes.*] Five.

[*Again Stanhope looks up. After a moment he quietly drops his revolver into its holster and steps towards Hibbert, who stands with lowered head and eyes tightly screwed up, his arms stretched stiffly by his sides, his hands tightly clutching the edges of his tunic. Gently Stanhope places his hands on Hibbert's shoulders. Hibbert starts violently*



*and gives a little cry. He opens his eyes and stares vacantly into Stanhope's face. Stanhope is smiling.*

STANHOPE. Good man, Hibbert. I liked the way you stuck that.

HIBBERT. [*Hoarsely.*] Why didn't you shoot?

STANHOPE. Stay here, old chap—and see it through——

*[Hibbert stands trembling, trying to speak. Suddenly he breaks down and cries. Stanhope takes his hands from his shoulders and turns away.]*

HIBBERT. Stanhope! I've tried like hell—I swear I have. Ever since I came out here I've hated and loathed it. Every sound up there makes me all—cold and sick. I'm different to—to the others—you don't understand. It's got worse and worse, and now I can't bear it any longer. I'll never go up those steps again—into the line—with the men looking at me—and knowing—I'd rather die here.

*[He is sitting on Stanhope's bed crying, without effort to restrain himself.]*

STANHOPE. [*Pouring out a whisky.*] Try a drop of this, old chap——

HIBBERT. No, thanks.

STANHOPE. Go on. Drink it. *[Hibbert takes the mug and drinks. Stanhope sits down beside Hibbert and puts an arm round his shoulder.]* I know what you feel, Hibbert. I've known all along——

HIBBERT. How *can* you know?

STANHOPE. Because I feel the same—exactly the same! Every little noise up there makes me feel—just as you feel. Why didn't you tell me instead of talking about neuralgia? We *all* feel like you do sometimes, if you only knew. I hate and loathe it all. Sometimes I feel I could just lie down on this bed and pretend I was paralysed or something—and couldn't move—and just lie there till I died—or was dragged away.

HIBBERT. I can't bear to go up into those awful trenches again——

STANHOPE. When are you due to go on?

HIBBERT. Quite soon. At four.

STANHOPE. Shall we go on together? We know how we both feel now. Shall we see if we can stick it together?

HIBBERT. I can't——

STANHOPE. Supposing I said *I* can't—supposing we *all* say we can't—what would happen then?

HIBBERT. I don't care. What does it matter? It's all so—so beastly—nothing matters——

STANHOPE. Supposing the worst happened—supposing we were knocked right out. Think of all the chaps who've gone already. It can't be very lonely there—with all those fellows. Sometimes I think it's lonelier here. [*He pauses. Hibbert is sitting quietly now, his eyes roving vacantly in front of him.*] Just go and have a quiet rest. Then we'll go out together.

HIBBERT. Do please let me go, Stanhope——

STANHOPE. If you went—and left Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh and all those men up there to do your work—could you ever look a man straight in the face again—in all your life? [*There is silence again.*] You may be wounded. Then you can go home and feel proud—and if you're killed you—you won't have to stand this hell any more. I might have fired just now. If I had you would have been dead now. But you're still alive—with a straight fighting chance of coming through. Take the chance, old chap, and stand in with Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh. Don't you think it worth standing in with men like that?—when you know they all feel like you do—in their hearts—and just go on sticking it because they know it's—it's the only thing a decent man can do. [*Again there is silence.*] What about it?

HIBBERT. I'll—I'll try——

STANHOPE. Good man!

HIBBERT. You—you won't say anything, Stanhope—about this?

STANHOPE. If you promise not to tell any one what a blasted funk I am.

HIBBERT. [*With a little laugh.*] No.

STANHOPE. Splendid! Now go and have ten minutes' rest and a smoke—then we'll go up together and hold each other's hands—and jump every time a rat squeaks. [*Hibbert rises and blows his nose.*] We've all got a good fighting chance. I mean to come through—don't you?

HIBBERT. Yes. Rather. [*He goes timidly towards his dug-out, and turns at the doorway.*] It's awfully decent of you, Stanhope—[*Stanhope is pouring himself out a whisky*—and thanks most awfully for——

STANHOPE. That's all right.

[*Hibbert goes away. Stanhope takes a drink and sits down at the table to write. Mason comes in.*]

MASON. Will you have a nice cup of tea, sir?

STANHOPE. Can you guarantee it's nice?

MASON. Well, sir—it's a bit oniony, but that's only because of the saucepan.

STANHOPE. In other words, it's onion soup with tea-leaves in it?

MASON. Not till dinner-time, sir.

STANHOPE. All right, Mason. Bring two cups of onion tea. One for Mr Hibbert.

MASON. Very good, sir. [*Going towards the door, he meets Osborne coming in.*] Will you have a nice cup of tea, sir?

OSBORNE. Please, Mason—and plenty of bread and butter and strawberry jam.

MASON. Very good, sir.

STANHOPE. Well, uncle—how are things going on up there?

OSBORNE. Two lonely rifle grenades came over just now.

STANHOPE. I heard them. Where did they pitch?

OSBORNE. Just over the front line on the left. Otherwise nothing doing. [*Pause.*]

STANHOPE. The colonel's been talking to me.

OSBORNE. About the attack?

STANHOPE. Partly. We've got to make a raid, uncle.

OSBORNE. Oh? When?

STANHOPE. To-morrow afternoon. Under a smoke screen. Two officers and ten men.

OSBORNE. Who's going?

STANHOPE. You and Raleigh. [*Pause.*]

OSBORNE. Oh. [*There is another pause.*] Why Raleigh?

STANHOPE. The colonel picked you to direct and Raleigh to dash in.

OSBORNE. I see.

STANHOPE. The brigadier wants to know who's opposite here.

OSBORNE. To-morrow? What time?

STANHOPE. I suggest about five o'clock. A little before dusk——

OSBORNE. I see.

STANHOPE. I'm damn sorry.

OSBORNE. That's all right, old chap.

STANHOPE. I'm dining with the colonel to arrange everything. Then I'll come back and go through it with you.

OSBORNE. Where do we raid from?

STANHOPE. Out of the sap on our left. Straight across.

OSBORNE. Where's the map?

STANHOPE. Here we are. Look. Straight across to this sentry post of the Boche. Sixty yards. To-night we'll lay out a guiding tape as far as possible. After dark the toc'-emmas



are going to break the Boche wire and we'll cut a passage in ours.

OSBORNE. Will you fix up the men who are to go?

STANHOPE. Are you keen on any special men?

OSBORNE. Can I take a corporal?

STANHOPE. Sure.

OSBORNE. May I have young Crooks?

STANHOPE. Righto.

OSBORNE. You'll ask for volunteers, I suppose?

STANHOPE. Yes. I'll see the sergeant-major and get him to go round for names.

*[He crosses to the doorway as Mason comes in with the tea.]*

MASON. Your tea, sir!

STANHOPE. Keep it hot, Mason.

MASON. Will you take this cup, Mr Osborne?

STANHOPE. Take the other in to Mr Hibbert, in there.

MASON. Very good, sir. *[He goes into Hibbert's dug-out.]*

STANHOPE. Shan't be long, uncle. *[He goes up the steps.]*

OSBORNE. Righto. *[Mason returns.]*

MASON. Will you have cut bread and butter—or shall I bring the loaf, sir?

OSBORNE. Cut it, Mason, please.

MASON. Just bringing the jam separately?

OSBORNE. Yes.

MASON. Very good, sir. *[Mason goes out.]*

*[Osborne takes a small leather-bound book from his pocket, opens it at a marker, and begins to read. Trotter appears from the sleeping dug-out looking very sleepy.]*

TROTTER. Tea ready?

OSBORNE. Yes.

TROTTER. Why's Hibbert got his tea in there?

OSBORNE. I don't know.

TROTTER. *[Rubbing his eyes.]* Oh, Lord, I do feel frowsy. 'Ad a fine sleep, though. *[Mason brings more tea and a pot of jam.]*

MASON. Bread just coming, sir. 'Ere's the strawberry jam, sir.

TROTTER. *[Reciting.]*

“Tell me, mother, what is that

That looks like strawberry jam?

“Hush, hush, my dear; 'tis only Pa

Run over by a tram——”

OSBORNE. The colonel came here while you were asleep.

TROTTER. Oh?

OSBORNE. We've got to make a raid to-morrow afternoon.

TROTTER. Oh, Lord! What—all of us?

OSBORNE. Two officers and ten men.

TROTTER. Who's got to do it?

OSBORNE. Raleigh and I.

TROTTER. Raleigh!

OSBORNE. Yes.

TROTTER. But 'e's only just come!

OSBORNE. Apparently that's the reason.

TROTTER. And you're going too?

OSBORNE. Yes.

TROTTER. Let's 'ear all about it.

OSBORNE. I know nothing yet. Except that it's got to be done.

TROTTER. What a damn nuisance!

OSBORNE. It is, rather.

TROTTER. I reckon the Boche are all ready waiting for it. Did you 'ear about the raid just south of 'ere the other night?

OSBORNE. Nothing much.

TROTTER. The trench-mortars go and knock an 'ole in the Boche wire to let our fellers through—and in the night the Boche went out and tied bits o' red rag on each side of the 'ole!

OSBORNE. Yes. I heard about that.

TROTTER. And even then our fellers 'ad to make the raid. It was murder. Doesn't this tea taste of onions?

OSBORNE. It does a bit.

TROTTER. Pity Mason don't clean 'is pots better. [*Mason brings some bread on a plate.*] This tea tastes of onions.

MASON. I'm sorry, sir. Onions do 'ave such a way of cropping up again.

TROTTER. Yes, but we 'aven't 'ad onions for days!

MASON. I know, sir. That's what makes it so funny.

TROTTER. Well, you better do something about it.

MASON. I'll look into it, sir.

[*He goes out. Osborne and Trotter prepare themselves slices of bread and jam.*]

TROTTER. Joking apart. It's damn ridiculous making a raid when the Boche are expecting it.

OSBORNE. We're not doing it for fun.

TROTTER. I know.

OSBORNE. You might avoid talking to Raleigh about it.

TROTTER. Why? How do you mean?

OSBORNE. There's no need to tell him it's murder——

TROTTER. Oh, Lord! no. [*He pauses.*] I'm sorry 'e's got to go.

'E 's a nice young feller—— [*Osborne turns to his book. There is silence.*] What are you reading?

OSBORNE. [*Wearily.*] Oh, just a book.

TROTTER. What 's the title?

OSBORNE. [*Showing him the cover.*] Ever read it?

TROTTER. [*Leaning over and reading the cover.*] *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*—why, that 's a kid's book!

OSBORNE. Yes.

TROTTER. You aren't *reading* it?

OSBORNE. Yes.

TROTTER. What—a *kid's* book?

OSBORNE. Haven't you read it?

TROTTER. [*Scornfully.*] No!

OSBORNE. You ought to.

[*Reads.*

'How doth the little crocodile  
Improve his shining tail,  
And pour the waters of the Nile  
On every golden scale!

'How cheerfully he seems to grin,  
How neatly spread his claws,  
And welcomes little fishes in  
With gently smiling jaws!'

TROTTER. [*After a moment's thought.*] I don't see no point in that.

OSBORNE. [*Wearily.*] Exactly. That 's just the point.

TROTTER. [*Looking curiously at Osborne.*] You *are* a funny chap!  
[*Stanhope returns.*

STANHOPE. The sergeant-major's getting volunteers.

OSBORNE. Good!

TROTTER. Sorry to 'ear about the raid, skipper.

STANHOPE. [*Shortly.*] So am I. What do you make the time?

TROTTER. Just on four. [Mason brings in more tea.

STANHOPE. [*Taking the mug of tea.*] Was Hibbert asleep when you came out of there?

TROTTER. No. 'E was just lying on 'is bed, smoking.

STANHOPE. [*Going to the sleeping dug-out.*] Hibbert!

HIBBERT. [*Coming out.*] I 'm ready, Stanhope.

STANHOPE. Had some tea?

HIBBERT. Yes, thanks.

TROTTER. I reckon Raleigh 'll be glad to be relieved. Rotten being on dooty for the first time alone.

OSBORNE. I don't think he minds.



STANHOPE. I shall be up there some time, uncle.

OSBORNE. I say, why don't you have a rest?—you've been on the go all day.

STANHOPE. There's too much to do. This raid's going to upset the arrangements of the wiring party to-night. Can't have men out there while the toc'-emmas are blowing holes in the Boche wire. [*He drinks up his tea.*] Ready, Hibbert? Come on, my lad.

*[Stanhope and Hibbert leave the dug-out together. Trotter looks after them curiously, and turns to Osborne.]*

TROTTER. Can't understand that little feller, can you?

OSBORNE. Who?

TROTTER. Why, 'Ibbert. D' you see 'is eyes? All red. 'E told me in there 'e'd got 'ay-fever.

OSBORNE. Rotten thing, hay-fever.

TROTTER. If you ask me, 'e's been crying——

*[Osborne is writing at the table.]*

OSBORNE. Maybe.

TROTTER. Funny little bloke, isn't 'e?

OSBORNE. Yes. I say—d' you mind? I just want to get a letter off.

TROTTER. Oh, sorry. They 'aven't collected the letters yet, then?

OSBORNE. Not yet.

TROTTER. I'll get one off to my old lady. [*He goes towards his dug-out.*] She's wrote and asked if I've got fleas.

OSBORNE. Have you?

TROTTER. [*Gently rotating his shoulders.*] I wish it *was* fleas.

*[Trotter goes into his dug-out; Osborne continues his letter. Raleigh comes down the steps from the trench.]*

RALEIGH. [*Excitedly.*] I say, Stanhope's told me about the raid.

OSBORNE. Has he?

RALEIGH. Just you and me, isn't it—and ten men?

OSBORNE. Yes, to-morrow. Just before dusk. Under a smoke cloud.

RALEIGH. I say—it's most frightfully exciting.

OSBORNE. We shall know more about it after Stanhope sees the colonel to-night.

RALEIGH. Were you and I picked—specially?

OSBORNE. Yes.

RALEIGH. I—say!

CURTAIN

## ACT III

### SCENE I

*The following day, towards sunset. The earth wall of the trench outside glows with a light that slowly fades with the sinking sun. Stanhope is alone, wandering to and fro across the dug-out. He looks up the steps for a moment, crosses to the table, and glances down at the map. He looks anxiously at his watch, and, going to the servant's dug-out, calls :*

STANHOPE. Mason!

MASON. [*Outside.*] Yessir!

STANHOPE. Are you making the coffee?

MASON. Yessir!

STANHOPE. Make it hot and strong. Ready in five minutes. I'll call when it's wanted.

MASON. Very good, sir.

*[Again Stanhope wanders restlessly to and fro. The Colonel comes down the steps.]*

COLONEL. Everything ready?

STANHOPE. Yes, sir. [*There is silence.*] You've no news, then?

COLONEL. I'm afraid not. It's got to be done.

STANHOPE. [*After a pause.*] I see.

COLONEL. The brigadier says the Boche did the same thing just south of here the other day.

STANHOPE. I know; but didn't you suggest we altered our plans and made a surprise raid farther up the line after dark?

COLONEL. Yes. I suggested that.

STANHOPE. What did he say?

COLONEL. He said the present arrangements have got to stand.

STANHOPE. But surely he must realize——?

COLONEL. [*Impatiently breaking in.*] Look here, Stanhope, I've done all I can, but my report's got to be at headquarters by seven this evening. If we wait till it's dark we shall be too late.

STANHOPE. Why seven?

COLONEL. They've got some conference to arrange the placing of reserves.

STANHOPE. They can't have it later because of dinner, I suppose.

COLONEL. Lots of raids have taken place along the line to-day.

With the attack to-morrow morning, headquarters naturally want all the information they can get as early as possible.

STANHOPE. Meanwhile the Boche are sitting over there with a dozen machine-guns trained on that hole—waiting for our fellows to come.

COLONEL. Well, I can't disobey orders.

STANHOPE. Why didn't the trench-mortars blow a dozen holes in different places—so the Boche wouldn't know which we were going to use?

COLONEL. It took three hours to blow that one. How could they blow a dozen in the time? It's no good worrying about that now. It's too late. Where's Osborne and Raleigh?

STANHOPE. They're up in the sap, having a last look round. What d'you make the time, sir?

COLONEL. Exactly nineteen minutes to.

STANHOPE. I'm thirty seconds behind you.

COLONEL. Funny. We checked this morning.

STANHOPE. Still, it's near enough. We shan't go till the smoke blows across.

COLONEL. The smoke ought to blow across nicely. The wind's just right. I called on the trench-mortars on the way up. Everything's ready. They'll drop the bombs thirty yards to the right.

STANHOPE. Are you going to stay here?

COLONEL. I'll watch from the trench just above, I think. Bring the prisoners straight back here. We'll question them right away.

STANHOPE. Why not take them straight down to your headquarters?

COLONEL. Well, the Boche are bound to shell pretty heavily. I don't want the risk of the prisoners being knocked out before we've talked to them.

STANHOPE. All right. I'll have them brought back here.

*[There is a pause. The Colonel sucks hard at his pipe. Stanhope roves restlessly about, smoking a cigarette.]*

COLONEL. It's no good getting depressed. After all, it's only sixty yards. The Boche'll be firing into a blank fog. Osborne's a cool, level-headed chap, and Raleigh's the very man to dash in. You've picked good men to follow them?



STANHOPE. The best. All youngsters. Strong, keen chaps.

COLONEL. Good. [*Another pause.*] You know quite well I'd give anything to cancel the beastly affair.

STANHOPE. I know you would, sir.

COLONEL. Have these red rags on the wire upset the men at all?

STANHOPE. It's hard to tell. They naturally take it as a joke. They say the rags are just what they want to show them the way through the gap.

COLONEL. That's the spirit, Stanhope. [*Osborne and Raleigh come down the steps.*] Well, Osborne. Everything ready?

OSBORNE. Yes, I think we're all ready, sir. I make it just a quarter to.

COLONEL. That's right.

OSBORNE. The men are going to stand by at three minutes to.

COLONEL. The smoke bombs drop exactly on the hour. You'll give the word to go when the smoke's thick enough?

OSBORNE. That's right, sir.

STANHOPE. [*At the servant's dug-out.*] Mason!

MASON. Coming, sir!

STANHOPE. Were the men having their rum, uncle?

OSBORNE. Yes. Just as we left. It gives it a quarter of an hour to soak in.

COLONEL. That's right. Are they cheerful?

OSBORNE. Yes. Quite.

[*Mason brings in two cups of coffee and puts them on table.*]

STANHOPE. Would you like to go up and speak to them, sir?

COLONEL. Well, don't you think they'd rather be left alone?

STANHOPE. I think they would appreciate a word or two.

COLONEL. All right. If you think they would.

OSBORNE. They're all in the centre dug-out, sir.

COLONEL. Right. You coming, Stanhope?

STANHOPE. Yes. I'll come, sir.

[*The Colonel lingers a moment. There is an awkward pause.*]

[*Then the Colonel clears his throat and speaks.*]

COLONEL. Well, good luck, Osborne. I'm certain you'll put up a good show.

OSBORNE. [*Taking the Colonel's hand.*] Thank you, sir.

COLONEL. And, Raleigh, just go in like blazes. Grab hold of the first Boche you see and bundle him across here. One'll do, but bring more if you see any handy.

RALEIGH. [*Taking the Colonel's offered hand.*] Right, sir.

COLONEL. And, if you succeed, I'll recommend you both for the M.C. [*Osborne and Raleigh murmur their thanks.*]

Remember, a great deal may depend on bringing in a German. It may mean the winning of the whole war. You never know. [*Another pause.*] Well, good luck to you both. [*Again Osborne and Raleigh murmur their thanks. The Colonel and Stanhope go towards the door. Over his shoulder.*] Don't forget to empty your pockets of papers and things.

RALEIGH. Oh, no.

*[He goes into his dug-out, taking letters and papers from his pockets. Stanhope is about to follow the Colonel up the steps when Osborne calls him back.]*

OSBORNE. Er—Stanhope—just a moment.

STANHOPE. [*Returning.*] Hallo!

OSBORNE. I say, don't think I'm being morbid, or anything like that, but would you mind taking these?

STANHOPE. Sure. Until you come back, old man.

OSBORNE. It's only just in case—— *[He takes a letter and his watch from his tunic pocket and puts it on the table. Then he pulls off his ring.]* If anything should happen, would you send these along to my wife?

*[He pauses, and gives an awkward little laugh.]*

STANHOPE. [*Putting the articles together on the table.*] You're coming back, old man. Damn it! what on earth should I do without you?

OSBORNE. [*Laughing.*] Goodness knows!

STANHOPE. Must have somebody to tuck me up in bed. [*There is a pause.*] Well, I'll see you up in the sap, before you go. Just have a spot of rum in that coffee.

OSBORNE. Righto.

*[Stanhope goes to the steps and lingers for a moment.]*

STANHOPE. Cheero!

*[For a second their eyes meet; they laugh. Stanhope goes slowly up the steps. There is silence in the dug-out. Osborne has been filling his pipe, and stands lighting it as Raleigh returns.]*

OSBORNE. Just time for a small pipe.

RALEIGH. Good. I'll have a cigarette, I think.

*[He feels in his pocket.]*

OSBORNE. Here you are.

*[He offers his case to Raleigh.]*

RALEIGH. I say, I'm always smoking yours.

OSBORNE. That's all right. [*Pause.*] What about this coffee?

RALEIGH. Sure.

*[They sit at the table.]*

OSBORNE. Are you going to have a drop of rum in it?

RALEIGH. Don't you think it might make us a—a bit muzzy?

OSBORNE. I'm just having the coffee as it is.

RALEIGH. I think I will, too.

OSBORNE. We'll have the rum afterwards—to celebrate.

RALEIGH. That's a much better idea.

*[They stir their coffee in silence. Osborne's eyes meet Raleigh's.*

*He smiles.*

OSBORNE. How d' you feel?

RALEIGH. All right.

OSBORNE. I've got a sort of empty feeling inside.

RALEIGH. That's just what I've got!

OSBORNE. Wind up!

RALEIGH. I keep wanting to yawn.

OSBORNE. That's it. Wind up. I keep wanting to yawn too.

It'll pass off directly we start.

RALEIGH. *[Taking a deep breath.]* I wish we could go now.

OSBORNE. *[Looking at his watch on the table.]* We've got eight minutes yet.

RALEIGH. Oh, Lord!

OSBORNE. Let's just have a last look at the map. *[He picks up the map and spreads it out.]* Directly the smoke's thick enough, I'll give the word. You run straight for this point here——

RALEIGH. When I get to the Boche wire I lie down and wait for you.

OSBORNE. Don't forget to throw your bombs.

RALEIGH. *[Patting his pocket.]* No. I've got them here.

OSBORNE. When I shout 'Righto!'—in you go with your eight men. I shall lie on the Boche parapet, and blow my whistle now and then to show you where I am. Pounce on the first Boche you see and bundle him out to me.

RALEIGH. Righto.

OSBORNE. Then we come back like blazes.

RALEIGH. The whole thing'll be over quite quickly?

OSBORNE. I reckon with luck we shall be back in three minutes.

RALEIGH. As quick as that?

OSBORNE. I think so. *[He folds up the map.]* And now let's forget all about it for—*[he looks at his watch]*—for six minutes.

RALEIGH. Oh, Lord, I can't!

OSBORNE. You must.

RALEIGH. How topping if we both get the M.C.!

OSBORNE. Yes. *[Pause.]* Your coffee sweet enough?

RALEIGH. Yes, thanks. It's jolly good coffee. *[Pause.]* I wonder what the Boche are doing over there now?



OSBORNE. I don't know. D' you like coffee better than tea?

RALEIGH. I do for breakfast. [*Pause.*] Do these smoke bombs make much row when they burst?

OSBORNE. Not much. [*Pause.*] Personally, I like cocoa for breakfast.

RALEIGH. [*Laughing.*] I'm sorry!

OSBORNE. Why sorry? Why shouldn't I have cocoa for breakfast?

RALEIGH. I don't mean that. I—mean—I'm sorry to keep talking about the raid. It's so difficult to—to talk about anything else. I was just wondering—will the Boche retaliate in any way after the raid?

OSBORNE. Bound to—a bit.

RALEIGH. Shelling?

OSBORNE. “‘The time has come,” the Walrus said,  
“To talk of many things:  
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—  
Of cabbages—and kings.””

RALEIGH.

“‘And why the sea is boiling hot—  
And whether pigs have wings.””

OSBORNE. Now we're off! Quick, let's talk about pigs! Black pigs or white pigs?

RALEIGH. Black pigs. In the New Forest you find them, quite wild.

OSBORNE. You know the New Forest?

RALEIGH. Rather! My home's down there. A little place called Allum Green, just outside Lyndhurst.

OSBORNE. I know Lyndhurst well.

RALEIGH. It's rather nice down there.

OSBORNE. I like it more than any place I know.

RALEIGH. I think I do, too. Of course, it's different when you've always lived in a place.

OSBORNE. You like it in a different way.

RALEIGH. Yes. Just behind our house there's a stream called the Highland; it runs for miles—right through the middle of the forest. Dennis and I followed it once as far as we could.

OSBORNE. I used to walk a lot round Lyndhurst.

RALEIGH. I wish we'd known each other then. You could have come with Dennis and me.

OSBORNE. I wish I had. I used to walk alone.

RALEIGH. You must come and stay with us one day.

OSBORNE. I should like to—awfully.

RALEIGH. I can show you places in the forest that nobody knows about except Dennis and me. It gets thicker and darker and cooler, and you stir up all kinds of funny wild animals.

OSBORNE. They say there are ruins, somewhere in the forest, of villages that William the Conqueror pulled down to let the forest grow.

RALEIGH. I know. We often used to look for them, but we haven't found them yet. [*Pause.*] You must come and help look one day.

OSBORNE. I'll find them all right.

RALEIGH. Then you can write to the papers. 'Dramatic Discovery of Professor Osborne!' [*Osborne laughs.*]

OSBORNE. I did go exploring once—digging up Roman remains.

RALEIGH. Where was that?

OSBORNE. Near my home in Sussex there's a Roman road called Stane Street; it runs as straight as a line from the coast to London.

RALEIGH. I know it.

OSBORNE. Near where I live the road runs over Bignor Hill, but in recent times a new road's been cut round the foot of the hill, meeting the old road again farther on. The old road over the hill hasn't been used for years and years—and it's all grown over with grass, and bushes and trees grow in the middle of it.

RALEIGH. Can you still see where it runs?

OSBORNE. Quite easily, in places.

RALEIGH. Did you dig a bit of it up, then?

OSBORNE. Yes. We got permission to dig out a section. It was in wonderful condition.

RALEIGH. Did you find anything?

OSBORNE. We found a horseshoe—and a Roman penny.

RALEIGH. [*Laughing.*] Splendid!

OSBORNE. It's awfully fascinating, digging like that.

RALEIGH. It must be. [*Osborne glances at his watch.*] Is it time yet?

OSBORNE. Two minutes. Then we must go up. I wish we had a good hot bath waiting for us when we get back.

RALEIGH. So do I. [*Pause.*] We're having something special for dinner, aren't we?

OSBORNE. How did you know? It's supposed to be a secret.

RALEIGH. Mason dropped a hint.

OSBORNE. Well, we've had a fresh chicken sent up from Noyelle Farm.

RALEIGH. I say!

OSBORNE. And a most awful luxury—two bottles of champagne and half a dozen cigars! One each, and one spare one in case one explodes.

RALEIGH. I've never smoked a cigar.

OSBORNE. It's bound to make you sick.

*[Raleigh notices Osborne's ring on the table; he picks it up.]*

RALEIGH. I say, here's your ring.

OSBORNE. Yes. I'm—I'm leaving it here. I don't want the risk of losing it.

RALEIGH. Oh! *[There is silence. He puts the ring slowly down.]*

OSBORNE. *[Rising.]* Well, I think perhaps we ought to get ready.

RALEIGH. Yes, Righto.

*[He also rises.]*

OSBORNE. I'm not going to wear a belt—just my revolver, with the lanyard round my neck.

RALEIGH. I see. *[He puts his lanyard round his neck and grips his revolver.]* I feel better with this in my hand, don't you?

OSBORNE. Yes. Something to hold. Loaded all right?

RALEIGH. Yes.

*[They put on their helmets. Osborne takes his pipe from his mouth and lays it carefully on the table.]*

OSBORNE. I do hate leaving a pipe when it's got a nice glow on the top like that.

RALEIGH. *[With a short laugh.]* What a pity!

*[There is another pause. Osborne glances at his watch as it lies on the table.]*

OSBORNE. Three minutes to. I think we'd better go.

RALEIGH. Righto. *[Their eyes meet as Osborne turns from the table.]*

OSBORNE. I'm glad it's you and I—together, Raleigh.

RALEIGH. *[Eagerly.]* Are you—really?

OSBORNE. Yes.

RALEIGH. So am I—awfully.

OSBORNE. We must put up a good show.

RALEIGH. Yes. Rather!

*[There is a short pause.]*

OSBORNE. Let's go along, shall we?

RALEIGH. Righto.

*[They go towards the steps. Mason comes to the entrance of his dug-out as they pass.]*

MASON. Good luck, sir.

OSBORNE. Thanks, Mason.

MASON. Good luck, Mr Raleigh.



RALEIGH. Thanks.

[Osborne and Raleigh go up together into the pale evening sun. Mason tidies the papers on the table; picks up the two coffee mugs, and goes away. There is silence in the trenches above the deserted dug-out. Then, suddenly, there comes the dull 'crush' of bursting smoke bombs, followed in a second by the vicious rattle of machine-guns. The red and green glow of German alarm rockets comes faintly through the dug-out door. Then comes the thin whistle and crash of falling shells; first one by itself, then two, almost together. Quicker and quicker they come, till the noise mingles together in confused turmoil. Yet the noise is deadened by the earth walls of the tiny dug-out, and comes quite softly till the whine of one shell rises above the others to a shriek and a crash. A dark funnel of earth leaps up beyond the parapet of the trench outside; earth falls and rattles down the steps, and a black cloud of smoke slowly rises out of sight. Gradually the noise dies away—there is a longer pause between the crash of each bursting shell. The machine-guns stop—rattle again and stop—rattle for the last time—and stop. Voices are calling in the trench outside; Stanhope's voice is heard.]

STANHOPE. All right, sir. Come down quickly!

COLONEL. How many?

STANHOPE. Only one. [Another shell whines and shrieks and crashes near by. There is silence for a moment, then Stanhope speaks again.] Hurt, sir?

COLONEL. No. It's all right.

[Stanhope, pale and haggard, comes down the steps, followed by the Colonel.]

STANHOPE. [Calling up the steps.] Bring him down, sergeant-major.

S.-M. [Above.] Coming, sir.

STANHOPE. [To the Colonel.] You won't want me, will you?

COLONEL. Well—er——

STANHOPE. I want to go and see those men.

COLONEL. Oh, all right.

[Stanhope goes to the door, making way for the Sergeant-Major to come down, followed by a bareheaded German Boy, in field grey, sobbing bitterly. Behind come two Soldiers with fixed bayonets. Stanhope goes up the steps. The Sergeant-Major takes the German Boy by the arm and draws him into the centre of the dug-out to face the Colonel,

*who has seated himself at the table. The two Soldiers stand behind.*

S.-M. [*Soothingly to the German Boy.*] All right, sonny, we ain't going to 'urt you.

*[Suddenly the Boy falls on his knees and sobs out some words in broken English.]*

GERMAN. Mercy—mister—mercy!

S.-M. Come on, lad, get up.

*[With a huge fist he takes the Boy by the collar and draws him to his feet. The Boy sobs hysterically. The Colonel clears his throat and begins in somewhat poor German.]*

COLONEL. Was ist sein Regiment?

GERMAN. Württembergisches.

COLONEL. Was ist der nummer von sein Regiment?

GERMAN. Zwanzig.

COLONEL. [*Making a note.*] Twentieth Württembergers. [*He looks up again.*] Wann kommen sie hier?

GERMAN. Gestern abend.

COLONEL. [*Making a note and looking up again.*] Wo kommen sie her?

GERMAN. [*After a moment's thought.*] Mein Geburtsort?

COLONEL. [*Forgetting himself for a moment.*] What 's that?

GERMAN. [*In halting English.*] You—wish—to know—where I was—born?

COLONEL. No! What town did you come up to the line from?

GERMAN. [*After a little hesitation.*] I—do not tell you.

COLONEL. Oh, well, that 's all right. [*To the Sergeant-Major.*] Search him.

*[The Sergeant-Major's big fists grope over the Boy's pockets. He produces a small book.]*

S.-M. [*Giving it to the Colonel.*] Looks like 'is pay-book, sir.

COLONEL. [*Looking eagerly into the book.*] Good.

*[The Sergeant-Major has found a pocket-book; the German Boy clutches at it impulsively.]*

S.-M. 'Ere, stop that!

GERMAN. Lassen sie mich! [*He pauses.*] Let—me—please—keep—that.

S.-M. [*Very embarrassed.*] You let go!

*[He wrenches the case away and gives it to the Colonel.]*

COLONEL. [*Glancing at the papers in the case.*] Look like letters. May be useful. Is that all, sergeant-major?

S.-M. [*Looking at a few articles in his hands.*] 'Ere 's a few odd-

ments, sir—bit o' string, sir; little box o' fruit drops; pocket-knife, sir; bit o' cedar pencil—and a stick o' chocolate, sir.

COLONEL. Let him have those back, except the pocket-knife.

S.-M. Very good, sir. [*He turns to the German Boy with a smile.*]

'Ere you are, sonny.

[*The German Boy takes back the oddments.*]

COLONEL. All right, sergeant-major. Send him straight back to my headquarters. I'll question him again there.

S.-M. Very good, sir. [*He turns to the German.*] Come on, sonny, up you go. [*He points up the steps.*]

[*The German Boy, calm now, bows stiffly to the Colonel and goes away, followed by the two Soldiers and the Sergeant-Major. The Colonel is deeply absorbed in the German's pay-book. He mutters 'Splendid!' to himself, then looks at his watch and rises quickly. Stanhope comes slowly down the steps.*]

COLONEL. [*Excitedly.*] Splendid, Stanhope! We've got all we wanted—20th Württembergers! His regiment came into the line last night. I must go right away and 'phone the brigadier. He'll be very pleased about it. It's a feather in our cap, Stanhope.

[*Stanhope has given one look of astonishment at the Colonel and strolled past him. He turns at the table and speaks in a dead voice.*]

STANHOPE. How awfully nice—if the brigadier's pleased.

[*The Colonel stares at Stanhope and suddenly collects himself.*]

COLONEL. Oh—er—what about the raiding-party—are they all safely back?

STANHOPE. Did you expect them to be all safely back, sir?

COLONEL. Oh—er—what—er——

STANHOPE. Four men and Raleigh came safely back, sir.

COLONEL. Oh, I say, I'm sorry! That's—er—six men and—er—Osborne?

STANHOPE. Yes, sir.

COLONEL. I'm very sorry. Poor Osborne!

STANHOPE. Still, it'll be awfully nice if the brigadier's pleased.

COLONEL. Don't be silly, Stanhope. Do you know—er—what happened to Osborne?

STANHOPE. A hand grenade—while he was waiting for Raleigh.

COLONEL. I'm very sorry. And the six men?

STANHOPE. Machine-gun bullets, I suppose.

COLONEL. Yes. I was afraid—er—— [*His words trail away; he fidgets uneasily as Stanhope looks at him with a pale, expression-*]



*less face. Raleigh comes slowly down the steps, walking as though he were asleep; his hands are bleeding. The Colonel turns to the boy with enthusiasm.] Very well done, Raleigh. Well done, my boy. I'll get you a Military Cross for this! Splendid! [Raleigh looks at the Colonel and tries to speak. He raises his hand to his forehead and sways. The Colonel takes him by the arm.] Sit down here, my boy. [Raleigh sits on the edge of Osborne's bed.] Have a good rest. Well, I must be off. [He moves towards the steps, and, turning once more to Raleigh as he leaves.] Very well done.*

*[With a quick glance at Stanhope, the Colonel goes away. There is silence now in the trenches outside; the last shell has whistled over and crashed. Dusk is beginning to fall over the German lines. The glow of Very lights begins to rise and fade against the evening sky. Stanhope is staring dumbly at the table—at Osborne's watch and ring. Presently he turns his haggard face towards Raleigh, who sits with lowered head, looking at the palms of his hands, Stanhope moves slowly across towards the doorway, and pauses to look down at Raleigh. Raleigh looks up into Stanhope's face, and their eyes meet. When Stanhope speaks, his voice is still expressionless and dead.]*

STANHOPE. Must you sit on Osborne's bed?

*[He turns and goes slowly up the steps. Raleigh rises unsteadily, murmurs 'Sorry' and stands with lowered head. Heavy guns are booming miles away.]*

## CURTAIN

## SCENE II

*Late evening on the same day.*

*The dug-out is lit quite festively by an unusual number of candles. Two champagne bottles stand prominent on the table. Dinner is over.*

*Stanhope, with a cigar between his teeth, lounges across the table, one elbow among the plates and mugs. His hair is ruffled; there is a bright red flush on his cheeks. He has just made a remark which*

*has sent Hibbert and Trotter into uproarious laughter; he listens with a smile. Trotter is sitting on the box to the right of the table, leaning back against the wall. A cigar is embedded in his podgy fingers; his face is a shiny scarlet, with deep red patches below the ears. The three bottom buttons of his tunic are undone, and now and then his hand steals gently over his distended stomach. Hibbert sits on the bed to the left, his thin white fingers nervously twitching the ash from his cigar. His pale face is shiny with sweat from the heat of the candles; his laugh is high-pitched and excited. Trotter speaks in a husky voice as the laughter dies away.*

TROTTER. And what did she say to that?

STANHOPE. She said, 'Not in these trousers'—in French.

*[Trotter and Hibbert burst into laughter again.]*

TROTTER. *[Coughing and wheezing.]* Oh—dear-o-dear!

STANHOPE. I simply drew myself up and said: 'Very well, mam'sel, have it your own way.'

TROTTER. And she did?

STANHOPE. No. She didn't.

*[Again the others laugh. Trotter wipes a tear from his eye.]*

TROTTER. Oh, skipper, you *are* a scream—and no mistake!

HIBBERT. I never forget picking up a couple of tarts one night and taking 'em out to dinner.

TROTTER. *[Winking at Stanhope.]* 'E's orf again.

HIBBERT. We drank enough bubbly to sink a battleship—

STANHOPE. To float a battleship.

HIBBERT. Well—to float a battleship. Then I took 'em for a joy-ride out to Maidenhead—did sixty all the way. We danced a bit at Skindles, and drank a lot of port and muck. Then damned if I didn't lose the way coming back—got landed miles from anywhere. And those tarts began cursing me like hell—said I'd done it on purpose. I said if they didn't damn well shut up I'd chuck 'em both out in the road and leave 'em.

STANHOPE. *[Ironically.]* Hurrah! That's the idea! Treat 'em rough!

HIBBERT. *[Giggling.]* That shut 'em up all right! Then I started doing about sixty down all sorts of roads—I went round a corner on two wheels with those girls' hair on end—didn't have any more trouble from *them*!

*[He chuckles at the memory, and takes an unsteady gulp of champagne.]*



STANHOPE. You're the sort of man who makes girls hard to please.

TROTTER. [*Heavily.*] Well, I never 'ad no motor car; my old lady and me used to walk; legs is good enough for me.

STANHOPE. You satisfied with legs?

TROTTER. *I am—yes!*

STANHOPE. Much cheaper.

HIBBERT. [*Laughing delightedly.*] That's damn good!

STANHOPE. [*Raising his mug.*] Well, here's a toast to legs—  
God bless 'em!

HIBBERT. [*Raising his mug.*] Good old legs!

TROTTER. [*Raising his mug.*] Shanks's mare.

STANHOPE. Shanks's *what?*

TROTTER. Shanks's mare they call 'em.

STANHOPE. Call what?

TROTTER. Why, legs.

HIBBERT. [*Almost screaming with delight.*] Oh, Trotter! you're a dream!

TROTTER. [*Turning a baleful eye on Hibbert.*] You've 'ad too much champagne, you 'ave.

*[Hibbert takes a leather case from his pocket and produces some picture post cards.]*

HIBBERT. I say, I've never shown you these, have I?

*[He hands them one by one to Stanhope, smiling up into Stanhope's face for approval.]*

STANHOPE. Where did you get these from?

HIBBERT. In Bethune. [*He hands up a card.*] She's all right, isn't she?

STANHOPE. Too fat.

HIBBERT. [*Looking over Stanhope's shoulder.*] Oh, I don't know.

STANHOPE. Much too fat. [*He hands the card to Trotter.*] What do you think, Trotter?

*[Trotter takes a pair of pince-nez from his pocket, balances them on his fat nose, and looks at the picture.]*

HIBBERT. All right, isn't she?

TROTTER. Well, I don't know. If you ask me, I'd rather 'ave a decent picture of Margate Pier.

HIBBERT. [*Impatiently.*] Oh, you don't understand *art.* [*He hands another card to Stanhope.*] There's a nice pair of legs for you.

STANHOPE. Too thin—aren't they, Trotter?

*[He hands Trotter the card.]*

TROTTER. [*After some thought.*] Scraggy, I call 'em.



HIBBERT. [*Handing Stanhope another card.*] That's the one I like best.

STANHOPE. Not bad.

HIBBERT. Glorious bedroom eyes.

STANHOPE. She's all right.

HIBBERT. Ever see that show *Zip* at the Hippodrome? Couple of damn fine girls in that—twins. Did you see 'em, skipper?

STANHOPE. [*Wearily.*] I don't know—seen stacks of shows—can't remember them all. [*He brightens up.*] Now then, swallow up that bubbly! Hi! Mason!

MASON. Yessir!

[*Mason appears.*]

STANHOPE. Bring some whisky.

MASON. Yessir.

[*He disappears.*]

TROTTER. What? Whisky on top of champagne?

STANHOPE. Why not? It's all right.

TROTTER. Well, I don't know; doesn't sound right to me. I feel as if somebody's blown me up with a bicycle pump.

STANHOPE. You look it, too.

TROTTER. [*Blowing a stream of cigar smoke up to the dark ceiling.*] Any'ow, it was a jolly fine bit o' chicken—and I'd go a mile any day for a chunk o' that jam pudding.

[*Mason brings a bottle of whisky.*]

STANHOPE. Your pudding's made Mr Trotter feel all blown out, Mason.

MASON. I'm sorry, sir; it wasn't meant, sir.

TROTTER. It was all right, Mason, take it from me. I know a decent bit o' pudden when I see it.

MASON. It was only boiled ration biscuits and jam, sir. [*He turns to Stanhope.*] I thought I better tell you, sir—this is the last bottle.

STANHOPE. The last bottle! Why, damn it, we brought six!

MASON. I know, sir. But five's gone.

STANHOPE. Where the devil's it gone to?

MASON. Well, sir, you remember there was one on the first night—and then one——

STANHOPE. Oh, for Lord's sake don't go through them one by one; this'll last till sunrise. [*He turns to Trotter and Hibbert.*] Sunrise to-morrow, my lads!

TROTTER. Oh, forget that.

STANHOPE. You bet we will! Now then! Who's for a spot of whisky?

TROTTER. I reckon I'm about full up. I'd like a nice cup o' tea, Mason.

MASON. Very good, sir.

[*He goes out.*]

STANHOPE. Tea!

TROTTER. Yes. That's what I want. Decent cup o' tea. Still, I'll just 'ave about a spoonful o' whisky—got a touch of palpitations.

STANHOPE. Here you are—say when!

TROTTER. Wo! That's enough!

STANHOPE. You'll have a decent spot, won't you, Hibbert?

HIBBERT. Yes. I'm game!

TROTTER. [*Stifling a hiccup.*] Just a cup o' tea—then I'll go and relieve young Raleigh. Pity 'e didn't come down to supper.

STANHOPE. I told him to. I told him to come down for an hour and let the sergeant-major take over.

TROTTER. I wonder why 'e didn't come.

HIBBERT. That lad's too keen on his 'duty.' He told me he liked being up there with the men better than down here with us.

STANHOPE. [*Quietly.*] He *said* that?

HIBBERT. Yes. I told him about the chicken and champagne and cigars—and he stared at me and said: 'You're not having that, are you?'—just as if he thought we were going to chuck it away!

TROTTER. I reckon that raid shook 'im up more 'n we thought. I like that youngster. 'E's got pluck. Strong lad, too—the way he came back through the smoke after that raid, carrying that Boche under 'is arm like a baby.

HIBBERT. Did you see him afterwards, though? He came into that dug-out and never said a word—didn't seem to know where he was.

TROTTER. Well, 'e's only a lad.

STANHOPE. [*To Hibbert.*] He actually told you he preferred being up with the men better than down here?

HIBBERT. That's what he said.

TROTTER. Well, I 'ope 'e gets the M.C., that's all; 'e's just the kid I'd like if ever I 'ave a kid—strong and plucky.

STANHOPE. Oh, for God's sake forget that bloody raid! Think I want to talk about it?

TROTTER. [*Surprised.*] No—but, after all——

STANHOPE. Well—shut up!

TROTTER. [*Uneasily.*] All right—all right.

STANHOPE. We were having a jolly decent evening till you started blabbing about the war.

TROTTER. I didn't start it.

STANHOPE. You did.

TROTTER. You began it about——

STANHOPE. Well, for God's sake stop it, then!

TROTTER. All right—all right.

HIBBERT. Did I ever tell you the story about the girl I met in Soho?

STANHOPE. I don't know—I expect you did.

HIBBERT. [*Undismayed.*] It'll amuse you. I'd been to a dance, and I was coming home quite late——

STANHOPE. Yes, and it's late now. You go on duty at eleven. You better go and get some sleep.

HIBBERT. It's all right. I'm as fresh as a daisy.

STANHOPE. You may be. But go to bed.

HIBBERT. What?

STANHOPE. [*Louder.*] I said: 'Go to bed!'

HIBBERT. I say, that's a nice end to a jolly evening!

STANHOPE. I'm sorry. I'm tired.

HIBBERT. [*Perkily.*] Well, you better go to bed!

[*There is silence. Stanhope looks at Hibbert, who sniggers.*]

STANHOPE. What was that you said?

HIBBERT. I was only joking.

STANHOPE. I asked you what you said.

HIBBERT. I said: 'You better go to bed.'

[*Stanhope's flushed face is looking full into Hibbert's. Hibbert gives the ghost of a snigger.*]

STANHOPE. Clear out of here!

HIBBERT. [*Rising unsteadily.*] What—what d' you mean?

STANHOPE. Get out of here, for God's sake!

HIBBERT. [*Blustering.*] I say—look here——

STANHOPE. Get out of my sight! [*With a frightened glance at Stanhope, Hibbert sneaks quietly away into his dug-out. There is silence, and the guns can be heard—deep and ominous.*] Little worm gets on my nerves.

TROTTER. Poor little bloke. Never seen 'im so cheerful before out 'ere.

STANHOPE. Doesn't he nearly drive you mad?

TROTTER. I reckon 'e only wanted to keep cheerful.

STANHOPE. Doesn't his repulsive little mind make you sick?

[*Mason brings Trotter's mug of tea and goes away.*] I envy you,

Trotter. Nothing upsets you, does it? You're always the same.

TROTTER. Always the same, am I? [*He sighs.*] Little you know——



STANHOPE. You never get sick to death of everything, or so happy you want to sing.

TROTTER. I don't know—I whistle sometimes.

STANHOPE. But you always *feel* the same.

TROTTER. I feel all blown out now. [*There is a pause. Trotter sips his tea and Stanhope takes a whisky.*] 'Ere's 'Ibbert's post cards. Funny a bloke carrying pictures like this about. Satisfies 'is lust, I s'pose—poor little feller. [*He rises.*] Well, I'll go and relieve young Raleigh. Pity 'e didn't come down to supper. [*He tries to button his tunic, without success. He buckles his webbing belt over his unbuttoned tunic, puts on his helmet, and slings his respirator over his shoulder.*] Well, cheero!

STANHOPE. You realize you're my second-in-command now, don't you?

TROTTER. Well, you 'adn't said nothing about it, but——

STANHOPE. Well, you are.

TROTTER. Righto, skipper. [*He pauses.*] Thanks. [*He goes towards the door.*] I won't let you down.

STANHOPE. After your duty, have a decent sleep. We must be ready at half-past five.

TROTTER. Righto, skipper. Well, I'll be going up. Give me a chance to cool off up there. It's as 'ot as 'ell in 'ere, with all them damn candles burning.

STANHOPE. I suppose it is. My head's nearly splitting.  
[*He blows out three of the candles, leaving the dim light of one.*]

TROTTER. [*Half up the steps.*] There's a bit of a mist rising.

STANHOPE. [*Dully.*] Is there? [*Trotter disappears into the night. Stanhope broods over the table.*] Mason!

MASON. [*Outside.*] Yessir!

STANHOPE. You can bring Mr Raleigh's dinner.

MASON. Very good, sir.

[*Mason brings a plate of steaming food, gathering up and taking away some of the used crockery. Presently Raleigh comes slowly down the steps. He pauses at the bottom, takes off his helmet, and hesitates. Stanhope is sitting at the table puffing at the remains of his cigar. There is silence except for the rumble of the guns.*]

STANHOPE. I thought I told you to come down to dinner at eight o'clock?

RALEIGH. Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't think you—er——

STANHOPE. Well? You didn't think I—er—what?

RALEIGH. I didn't think you 'd—you 'd mind—if I didn't.

STANHOPE. I see. And why do you think I asked you—if I didn't mind?

RALEIGH. I'm sorry.

STANHOPE. Well, we've kept your dinner. It's ready for you here.

RALEIGH. Oh, it's awfully good of you to have kept it for me, but—I—I had something to eat up there.

STANHOPE. You—had something to eat up there? What do you mean, exactly?

RALEIGH. They brought the tea round while I was on duty. I had a cup, and some bread and cheese.

STANHOPE. Are you telling me—you've been feeding with the men?

RALEIGH. Well, Sergeant Baker suggested——

STANHOPE. So you take your orders from Sergeant Baker, do you?

RALEIGH. No, but——

STANHOPE. You eat the men's rations when there's barely enough for each man?

RALEIGH. They asked me to share.

STANHOPE. Now, look here. I know you're new to this, but I thought you'd have the common sense to leave the men alone to their meals. Do you think they want an officer prowling round eating their rations, and sucking up to them like that? My officers are here to be respected—not laughed at.

RALEIGH. Why did they ask me—if they didn't mean it?

STANHOPE. Don't you realize they were making a fool of you?

RALEIGH. Why should they?

STANHOPE. So you know more about my men than I do?

*[There is silence. Raleigh is facing Stanhope squarely.]*

RALEIGH. I'm sorry then—if I was wrong.

STANHOPE. Sit down.

RALEIGH. It's all right, thanks.

STANHOPE. *[Suddenly shouting.] Sit down!* *[Raleigh sits on the box to the right of the table. Stanhope speaks quietly again.]*

I understand you prefer being up there with the men than down here with us?

RALEIGH. I don't see what you mean.

STANHOPE. What did you tell Hibbert?

RALEIGH. Hibbert? I—I didn't say——

STANHOPE. Don't lie.

RALEIGH. *[Rising.]* I'm not lying! Why should I—lie?

STANHOPE. Then why didn't you come down to supper when I told you to?

RALEIGH. I—I wasn't hungry. I had rather a headache. It's cooler up there.

STANHOPE. You insulted Trotter and Hibbert by not coming. You realize that, I suppose?

RALEIGH. I didn't mean to do anything like that.

STANHOPE. Well, you did. You know now—don't you?  
[*Raleigh makes no reply. He is trying to understand why Stanhope's temper has risen to a trembling fury. Stanhope can scarcely control his voice. Loudly.*] I say—you know now, don't you?

RALEIGH. Yes, I'm sorry.

STANHOPE. My officers work *together*. I'll have no damn prigs.

RALEIGH. I'll speak to Trotter and Hibbert. I didn't realize—  
[*Stanhope raises his cigar. His hand trembles so violently that he can scarcely take the cigar between his teeth. Raleigh looks at Stanhope, fascinated and horrified.*]

STANHOPE. What are you looking at?

RALEIGH. [*Lowering his head.*] Nothing.

STANHOPE. Anything—*funny* about me?

RALEIGH. No. [*After a moment's silence, Raleigh speaks in a low, halting voice.*] I'm awfully sorry, Dennis, if—if I annoyed you by coming to your company.

STANHOPE. What on *earth* are you talking about? What do you mean?

RALEIGH. You resent my being here.

STANHOPE. Resent you *being* here?

RALEIGH. Ever since I came——

STANHOPE. I don't know what you mean. I resent you being a damn fool, that's all. [*There is a pause.*] Better eat your dinner before it's cold.

RALEIGH. I'm not hungry, thanks.

STANHOPE. Oh, for God's sake, sit down and eat it like a man!

RALEIGH. I can't eat it, thanks.

STANHOPE. [*Shouting.*] Are you going to eat your dinner?

RALEIGH. Good God! Don't you understand? How *can* I sit down and eat that—when—[*his voice is nearly breaking*]—when Osborne's—lying—out there——

[*Stanhope rises slowly. His eyes are wild and staring; he is fighting for breath, and his words come brokenly.*]

STANHOPE. My God! You bloody little swine! You think I don't care—you think you're the only soul that cares!



RALEIGH. And yet you can sit there and drink champagne—and smoke cigars——

STANHOPE. The one man I could trust—my best friend—the one man I could talk to as man to man—who understood everything—and you think I don't care——

RALEIGH. But how can you when——?

STANHOPE. To forget, you little fool—to forget! D' you understand? To forget! You think there's no limit to what a man can bear?

*[He turns quickly from Raleigh and goes to the dark corner by Osborne's bed. He stands with his face towards the wall, his shoulders heaving as he fights for breath.]*

RALEIGH. I'm awfully sorry, Dennis. I—I didn't understand.

*[Stanhope makes no reply.]* You don't know how—I——

STANHOPE. Go away, please—leave me alone.

RALEIGH. Can't I——

*[Stanhope turns wildly upon Raleigh.]*

STANHOPE. Oh, get out! For God's sake, get out!

*[Raleigh goes away into his dug-out, and Stanhope is alone. The Very lights rise and fall outside, softly breaking the darkness with their glow—sometimes steel-blue, sometimes grey. Through the night there comes the impatient grumble of gunfire that never dies away.]*

## CURTAIN

## SCENE III

*Towards dawn. The candles are no longer burning. The intense darkness of the dug-out is softened by the glow of the Very lights in the sky beyond the doorway. There is no sound except the distant mutter of the guns. A man comes from the servant's dug-out; for a moment his head and shoulders stand out black against the glowing sky, then he passes on into the darkness by the table. There comes the rasp of a striking match—a tiny flame—and a candle gleams. Mason blinks in the light and turns to Stanhope's bed. Stanhope lies huddled with his blanket drawn tightly round him.]*

MASON. *[Softly.]* Sir—— *[Stanhope does not move; Mason shakes him gently by the knee. A little louder.]* Sir——

STANHOPE. Yes? [*There is a pause.*] That you, Mason?

MASON. 'Arf-past five, sir.

STANHOPE. Oh, right. [*He raises himself on his elbow.*] I was only half asleep. I keep on waking up. It's so frightfully cold in here.

MASON. It's a cold dug-out, this one, sir. I've made some 'ot tea.

STANHOPE. Good. You might bring me some.

MASON. Right you are, sir.

STANHOPE. And take some to the officers in there—and wake them up.

MASON. Very good, sir.

[*Mason goes to his dug-out. Stanhope rises stiffly from his bed, shudders from the cold, and slowly begins putting his equipment on. Trotter wanders in from his dug-out vigorously lathering his face. He is dressed, except for his collar.*

TROTTER. Wash and brush-up, tuppence!

STANHOPE. [*Looking up, surprised.*] Hallo! I thought you were asleep.

TROTTER. I 'ad a decent sleep when I come off dooty. What's the time?

STANHOPE. Half-past five. It'll be getting light soon. You better buck up.

TROTTER. All right. I shan't be long. Sounds quiet enough out there.

STANHOPE. Yes. [*Mason brings four mugs of tea.*

TROTTER. Ah! that's what I want. A decent cup of tea.

MASON. [*Putting a mug on the table for Stanhope.*] Nice and 'ot, sir. I've cut a packet of sambridges for each gentleman, sir.

STANHOPE. Good. [*Mason takes the other mugs of tea into the right-hand dug-out. Trotter follows, lathering with gusto.*] You might give Hibbert and Raleigh a call.

TROTTER. I woke 'em up, skipper. They're getting their things on. [*Mason returns.*

STANHOPE. When you've cleaned up your kitchen, you must dress and join your platoon in the line.

MASON. Very good, sir.

STANHOPE. If things are going well at eleven o'clock, come down here and do your best to get some lunch for us. We shall come down in turn as we can.

MASON. Very good, sir.

*[Stanhope sits at the table and begins to write a short report. The first sign of dawn is beginning to gleam in the dark sky. Stanhope calls 'Runner!' as he writes. A Soldier comes from the servant's dug-out.]*

STANHOPE. *[Folding the note.]* Take this to Battalion Headquarters. There's no reply.

SOLDIER. Yessir.

*[The soldier salutes and goes up the steps. A plaintive noise comes from the other dug-out. Trotter is singing 'There's a long, long trail a-winding.' Stanhope listens for a moment, then rises, takes a few small coins from his pocket, and throws them into Trotter's dug-out. The singing stops abruptly. After a moment Trotter's voice comes.]*

TROTTER. Thank you kindly, gov'nor!

*[The Sergeant-Major comes down the steps.]*

STANHOPE. Morning, sergeant-major.

S.-M. Morning sir. Wiring parties are just in, sir. Made a decent job of it—right down to the support line.

STANHOPE. Good. Everything quiet?

S.-M. It's all right opposite 'ere, sir, but the guns are goin' 'ard down south. 'Eavy bombardment. Not sure if it ain't spreading up this way, sir.

STANHOPE. Very likely it is. The officers are coming up in a minute. They'll stand by with their platoons. I must stay here awhile in case of messages. I shall come up directly things begin to happen.

S.-M. Very good, sir.

STANHOPE. Are the men having their tea?

S.-M. Yessir.

STANHOPE. Let 'em have a decent drop of rum.

S.-M. About 'arf again, sir?

STANHOPE. Yes.

S.-M. If the attack don't come, sir, 'ow long are we to stand-to?

STANHOPE. We must expect the attack any time up till midday. After then I don't think it'll come till to-morrow.

S.-M. Very good, sir.

STANHOPE. We must naturally make our plans to meet things as they happen.

S.-M. Quite, sir.

STANHOPE. All right, sergeant-major. I'll see you up there soon.



S.-M. Yessir.

*[He salutes and goes away. Mason brings in four little packets of sandwiches, and puts one packet on the table for Stanhope.]*

MASON. Your sambridges, sir. 'Arf bully beef and 'arf sardine. Sardine on top, sir.

STANHOPE. How delicious. No *pâté de foie gras*?

MASON. No what, sir?

STANHOPE. No *pâté de foie gras*?

MASON. No, sir. The milkman 'asn't been yet.

*[Mason takes the other parcels to the left-hand dug-out. Stanhope pours a little whisky into his tea and the remainder of the contents of the bottle into his flask. Mason returns.]*

STANHOPE. Get dressed as soon as you can.

MASON. Yessir.

*[Mason goes out. Trotter comes in, fully dressed for the line.]*

TROTTER. All ready, skipper. Want me to go up?

STANHOPE. Yes. I think so. Go right round the line and see everything 's all right. I 'll be up soon.

*[Suddenly there comes the faint whistle and thud of falling shells—a few seconds between each. Stanhope and Trotter listen intently, four shells fall, then silence.]*

TROTTER. 'Allo, 'allo!

*[Stanhope strides to the doorway, goes up a few steps, and looks out into the night. He comes slowly back.]*

STANHOPE. Over on Lancer's Alley—somewhere by the reserve line. *[There comes the louder thud of three more shells.]*

TROTTER. That 's nearer.

STANHOPE. Better go up, Trotter. Call the others.

TROTTER. *[At the left-hand dug-out.]* 'Ibbert! Raleigh! come on!

*[He lights a cigarette over the candle, lingers a moment, and slowly goes up the steps.]* Cheero, skipper. See you later.

STANHOPE. Send your runner down to tell me how things are going.

TROTTER. Righto. *[Trotter disappears into the dark.]*

*[A vague white line of dawn is broadening above the dark trench wall outside. Stanhope sits at the table and sips his tea. He takes a cigarette and lights it with a quivering hand. Raleigh comes from his dug-out. Stanhope lowers his head and writes in his note-book.]*

RALEIGH. Do you want me to go up?

STANHOPE. *[Without looking up.]* Yes. Trotter 's gone.

RALEIGH. Right. [*He goes to the steps and turns shyly.*] Cheero—Stanhope.

STANHOPE. [*Still writing with lowered head.*] Cheero, Raleigh. I shall be coming up soon. [*Raleigh goes up the steps. Stanhope stops writing, raises his head, and listens. The shells are falling steadily now. He glances towards the left-hand dug-out and calls:*] Hibbert! [*There is no reply. He slowly rises and goes to the left-hand dug-out doorway. He calls again—louder:*] Hibbert!! [*He looks into the doorway and says:*] What are you doing? [*Hibbert appears. He is very pale; he moves as if half asleep.*] Come along, man!

HIBBERT. You want me to go up now?

STANHOPE. Of course I do. The others have gone.

HIBBERT. Got a drop of water?

STANHOPE. What d' you want water for?

HIBBERT. I'm so frightfully thirsty. All that champagne and stuff—dried my mouth up.

[*Stanhope pours a drop of water into a mug and gives it to Hibbert.*]

STANHOPE. Here you are. Didn't you have any tea?

HIBBERT. Yes. It was a bit sweet, though.

[*The shelling is steadily increasing, and now, above the lighter 'crush' of the smaller shells, there comes the deep, re-sounding 'boom' of Minenwerfer. Hibbert sips his water very slowly, rinsing his mouth deliberately with each sip. Stanhope is by the doorway, looking up into the trench. He has just turned away as a sonorous drawn-out call comes floating through the dawn: 'Stretcher bear-ers!' Stanhope half turns, then faces Hibbert.*]

STANHOPE. Come on. Buck up.

HIBBERT. There's no appalling hurry, is there?

STANHOPE. No hurry! Why d' you think the others have gone up?

HIBBERT. [*Slowly.*] What? Trotter and Raleigh?

STANHOPE. [*Sharply.*] Wake up, man! What the devil's the matter with you?

[*Hibbert slowly puts down his mug.*]

HIBBERT. Champagne dries the mouth up so. Makes the tongue feel like a bit of paper. [*There is a slight pause.*]

STANHOPE. The longer you stay here, the harder it'll be to go up.

HIBBERT. Good Lord! You don't think I'm——

STANHOPE. You're just wasting as much time as you can.

HIBBERT. Well, damn it, it's no good going up till I feel fit. Let's just have another spot of water.

*[Hibbert takes the jug and pours out a little more water. He is the picture of misery. Stanhope stands impatiently beside him. Mason appears from his dug-out, fully dressed for the line, his rifle slung over his shoulder.]*

MASON. I'll go right along, sir. I've made up the fire to last a good three hours—if you don't mind me popping down about nine o'clock to 'ave a look at it.

STANHOPE. All right, Mason. Mr Hibbert's coming up now. You can go along with him.

MASON. *[To Hibbert.]* I'd like to come along of you if you don't mind, sir. I ain't bin up in this part of the front line. Don't want to get lorst.

STANHOPE. Mr Hibbert'll show you the way up. *[He turns to Hibbert.]* Keep your men against the back wall of the trench as long as the shells are dropping behind. Cheero! *[Hibbert looks at Stanhope for a moment, then, with a slight smile he goes slowly up the steps and into the trench, Mason following behind. A dark figure stands out against the pale sky; comes hurrying down the steps—a private soldier, out of breath and excited.]* Yes?

SOLDIER. Message from Mr Trotter, sir. Shells falling mostly behind support line. Minnies along front line.

STANHOPE. Who's just been hit?

SOLDIER. Corporal Ross, I think it was, sir. Minnie dropped in the trench at the corner—just as I come away.

*[The Sergeant-Major comes down the steps, very much out of breath.]*

STANHOPE. *[To the Soldier.]* All right, thanks.

*[The Soldier salutes, and goes up the steps slower than he came.]*

S.-M. Beginning to get 'ot, sir.

STANHOPE. Corporal Ross hit?

S.-M. Yessir.

STANHOPE. Badly?

S.-M. Pretty badly, sir.

STANHOPE. Most of the shelling's going over, isn't it?

S.-M. Most of the *shells* is be'ind, sir, but there's Minnies and rifle grenades along the front line. Pretty 'ot it's getting, sir.

They're attacking down south—there's rifle fire.

STANHOPE. All right, sergeant-major; thanks.

S.-M. What I come to ask, sir—what about the wounded—



getting 'em down, sir? The shelling's pretty thick over Lancer's Alley.

STANHOPE. What about Fosse Way?

S.-M. Pretty bad there, too, sir.

STANHOPE. Don't try then. Take any one badly hit down into the big dug-out on the right. Let the stretcher-bearers do what they can there.

S.-M. Very good, sir.

STANHOPE. Only Corporal Ross hit?

S.-M. That 's all, sir——

*[Again there comes the drawn-out call—several times as it is passed from man to man: 'Stretcher-bear-ers!' The Sergeant-Major's eyes meet Stanhope's. He turns and goes up the steps. Stanhope is alone. Flying fragments of shell whistle and hiss and moan overhead. The sharp 'crack' of the rifle grenades, the thud of the shells, and the boom of the Minenwerfer mingle together in a muffled roar. Stanhope takes his belt from the table and buckles it on, puts his revolver lanyard round his neck, and drops his flask and sandwiches into his pocket. The Sergeant-Major reappears and comes hurrying down the steps.]*

STANHOPE. *[Turning quickly.]* What is it, sergeant-major?

S.-M. Mr Raleigh, sir——

STANHOPE. What!

S.-M. Mr Raleigh's been 'it, sir. Bit of shell's got 'im in the back.

STANHOPE. Badly?

S.-M. 'Fraid it 's broke 'is spine, sir; can't move 'is legs.

STANHOPE. Bring him down here.

S.-M. Down 'ere, sir?

STANHOPE. *[Shouting.]* Yes! Down here—quickly! *[The Sergeant-Major shrinks back and throws his hand across his face, as though a human hand could ward off the hot flying pieces. He stumbles on again into the trench, and hurriedly away. Stanhope is by Osborne's bed, fumbling a blanket over it. He takes a trench coat off the wall and rolls it for a pillow. He goes to his own bed, takes up his blanket, and turns as the Sergeant-Major comes carefully down the steps carrying Raleigh like a child in his huge arms. With blanket ready.]* Lay him down there.

S.-M. 'E 's fainted sir. 'E was conscious when I picked 'im up.

*[The Sergeant-Major lays the boy gently on the bed; he draws away his hands, looks furtively at the palms, and wipes the blood on the sides of his trousers. Stanhope covers*

*Raleigh with his blanket, looks intently at the boy, and turns to the Sergeant-Major.*

STANHOPE. Have they dressed the wound?

S.-M. They 've just put a pad on it, sir. Can't do no more.

STANHOPE. Go at once and bring two men with a stretcher.

S.-M. We 'll never get 'im down, sir, with them shells falling on Lancer's Alley.

STANHOPE. Did you hear what I said? Go and get two men with a stretcher.

S.-M. [*After a moment's hesitation.*] Very good, sir.

*[The Sergeant-Major goes slowly away. Stanhope turns to Raleigh once more, then goes to the table, pushes his handkerchief into the water-jug, and brings it, wringing wet, to Raleigh's bed. He bathes the boy's face. Presently Raleigh gives a little moan, opens his eyes, and turns his head.]*

RALEIGH. Hallo—Dennis——

STANHOPE. Well, Jimmy. [*He smiles.*] You got one quickly.

*[There is silence for a while. Stanhope is sitting on a box beside Raleigh. Presently Raleigh speaks again—in a wondering voice.]*

RALEIGH. Why—how did I get down here?

STANHOPE. Sergeant-major brought you down.

*[Raleigh speaks again, vaguely, trying to recollect.]*

RALEIGH. Something—hit me in the back—knocked me clean over—sort of—winded me—I 'm all right now.

*[He tries to rise.]*

STANHOPE. Steady, old boy. Just lie there quietly for a bit.

RALEIGH. I 'll be better if I get up and walk about. It happened once before—I got kicked in just the same place at rugger; it—it soon wore off. It—it just numbs you for a bit.

*[There is a pause.]* What 's that rumbling noise?

STANHOPE. The guns are making a bit of a row.

RALEIGH. Our guns?

STANHOPE. No. Mostly theirs.

*[Again there is silence in the dug-out. A very faint rose light is beginning to glow in the dawn sky. Raleigh speaks again—uneasily.]*

RALEIGH. I say—Dennis——

STANHOPE. Yes, old boy?

RALEIGH. It—it hasn't gone through, has it? It only just hit me?—and knocked me down?

STANHOPE. It's just gone through a bit, Jimmy.

RALEIGH. I won't have to—go on lying here?

STANHOPE. I'm going to have you taken away.

RALEIGH. Away? Where?

STANHOPE. Down to the dressing-station—then hospital—then home. [*He smiles.*] You've got a Blighty one, Jimmy.

RALEIGH. But I—I can't go home just for—for a knock in the back. [*He stirs restlessly.*] I'm certain I'll be better if—if I get up. [*He tries to raise himself, and gives a sudden cry.*] Oh—God! It does hurt!

STANHOPE. It's bound to hurt, Jimmy.

RALEIGH. What's—on my legs? Something holding them down——

STANHOPE. It's all right, old chap; it's just the shock—numbed them.

[*Again there is a pause. When Raleigh speaks, there is a different note in his voice.*]

RALEIGH. It's awfully decent of you to bother, Dennis. I feel rotten lying here—everybody else—up there.

STANHOPE. It's not your fault, Jimmy.

RALEIGH. So—damn—silly—getting hit. [*Pause.*] Is there—just a drop of water?

STANHOPE. [*Rising quickly.*] Sure. I've got some here. [*He pours some water into the mug and brings it to Raleigh. Cheerfully.*] Got some tea-leaves in it. D'you mind?

RALEIGH. No. That's all right—thanks—— [*Stanhope holds the mug to Raleigh's lips, and the boy drinks.*] I say, Dennis, don't you wait—if—if you want to be getting on.

STANHOPE. It's quite all right, Jimmy.

RALEIGH. Can you stay for a bit?

STANHOPE. Of course I can.

RALEIGH. [*Faintly.*] Thanks awfully. [*There is quiet in the dug-out for a long time. Stanhope sits with one hand on Raleigh's arm, and Raleigh lies very still. Presently he speaks again—hardly above a whisper.*] Dennis——

STANHOPE. Yes, old boy?

RALEIGH. Could we have a light? It's—it's so frightfully dark and cold.

STANHOPE. [*Rising.*] Sure! I'll bring a candle and get another blanket. [*Stanhope goes to the left-hand dug-out, and Raleigh is alone, very still and quiet, on Osborne's bed. The faint rosy glow of the dawn is deepening to an angry red. The grey night sky is dissolving, and the stars begin to go. A tiny sound comes*]



from where Raleigh is lying—something between a sob and a moan. Stanhope comes back with a blanket. He takes a candle from the table and carries it to Raleigh's bed. He puts it on the box beside Raleigh and speaks cheerfully.] Is that better, Jimmy? [Raleigh makes no sign.] Jimmy—

[Still Raleigh is quiet. Stanhope gently takes his hand. There is a long silence. Stanhope lowers Raleigh's hand to the bed, rises, and takes the candle back to the table. He sits on the bench behind the table with his back to the wall, and stares listlessly across at the boy on Osborne's bed. The solitary candle-flame throws up the lines on his pale, drawn face, and the dark shadows under his tired eyes. The thudding of the shells rises and falls like an angry sea. A Private Soldier comes scrambling down the steps, his round, red face wet with perspiration, his chest heaving for breath.]

SOLDIER. Message from Mr Trotter, sir—will you come at once. [Stanhope gazes round at the soldier—and makes no other sign.] Mr Trotter, sir—says will you come at once!

[Stanhope rises stiffly and takes his helmet from the table.]

STANHOPE. All right, Broughton, I'm coming.

[The Soldier turns and goes away.]

[Stanhope pauses for a moment by Osborne's bed and lightly runs his fingers over Raleigh's tousled hair. He goes stiffly up the steps, his tall figure black against the dawn sky. The shelling has risen to a great fury. The solitary candle burns with a steady flame, and Raleigh lies in the shadows. The whine of a shell rises to a shriek and bursts on the dug-out roof. The shock stabs out the candle-flame; the timber props of the door cave slowly in, sand-bags fall and block the passage to the open air. There is darkness in the dug-out. Here and there the red dawn glows through the jagged holes of the broken doorway. Very faintly there comes the dull rattle of machine-guns and the fevered spatter of rifle fire.]

CURTAIN

# FOR SERVICES RENDERED

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

## CHARACTERS

LEONARD ARDSLEY

CHARLOTTE ARDSLEY, his wife

SYDNEY, his son

EVA }  
LOIS } his unmarried daughters

ETHEL BARTLETT, his married daughter

HOWARD BARTLETT, her husband

COLLIE STRATTON, Commander, R.N.

WILFRED CEDAR

GWEN, his wife

DR PRENTICE, Mrs Ardsley's brother

GERTRUDE, the Ardsleys' parlourmaid

*The action takes place in the Ardsleys' house at Rambleston, a small country town in Kent near the cathedral city of Stanbury.*

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This play was produced at the Globe Theatre on November 1st, 1932, with the following cast:

LEONARD ARDSLEY	.	C. V. France
CHARLOTTE ARDSLEY	.	Louise Hampton
SYDNEY . . .	.	Cedric Hardwicke
EVA . . . .	.	Flora Robson
LOIS . . . .	.	Marjorie Mars
ETHEL BARTLETT	.	Diana Hamilton
HOWARD BARTLETT	.	W. Cronin-Wilson
COLLIE STRATTON	.	Ralph Richardson
WILFRED CEDAR .	.	S. J. Warmington
GWEN CEDAR . .	.	Marda Vanne
DR PRENTICE . .	.	David Hawthorne
GERTRUDE . . .	.	Phyllis Shand



## ACT I

*The scene is a terrace at the back of the Ardsleys' house. French windows lead out on it from the house, and beyond is the garden. Leonard Ardsley is the only solicitor in Rambleston and his house faces the village street. Part of it is used as his office.*

*Tea is laid. It is five o'clock on a warm afternoon in September. Mrs Ardsley is sitting in a chair, hemming a napkin. She is a thin, grey-haired woman of more than sixty, with a severe face but kind eyes. She is very quietly dressed.*

*The Maid brings in the tea*

MRS ARDSLEY. Is it tea-time?

GERTRUDE. The church clock's striking now, ma'am.

MRS ARDSLEY. [*Getting up and putting her sewing aside.*] Go down to the tennis court and tell them that tea is ready.

GERTRUDE. Very good, ma'am.

MRS ARDSLEY. Have you told Mr Sydney?

GERTRUDE. Yes, ma'am.

*[She goes out into the garden. Mrs Ardsley brings two or three light chairs up to the table. Sydney comes in from the house. He is a heavy man of hard on forty, with a big, fat face. He is blind and walks with a stick, but he knows his way about and moves with little hesitation.]*

MRS ARDSLEY. Where would you like to sit, dear?

SYDNEY. Anywhere.

*[He lets himself down into a chair by the table and puts down his stick.]*

MRS ARDSLEY. What have you been doing all the afternoon?

SYDNEY. Nothing very much. Knitting a bit.

MRS ARDSLEY. Ethel's here. Howard's coming to fetch her on his way home from Stanbury. He's gone to the cattle-market.

SYDNEY. I suppose he'll be as tight as a drum.

MRS ARDSLEY. Sydney!

SYDNEY. [*With a little chuckle.*] What rot it all is. Does Ethel really think we don't know he drinks?

MRS ARDSLEY. She's proud. She doesn't want to admit that she made a mistake.

SYDNEY. I shall never stop asking myself what on earth she saw in him.

MRS ARDSLEY. Everything was so different then. He looked very nice in uniform. He was an officer.

SYDNEY. You and father ought to have put your foot down.

MRS ARDSLEY. They were madly in love with one another. When all that slaughter was going on it seemed so snobbish to object to a man because he was just a small tenant farmer.

SYDNEY. Did you think the war was going on for ever?

MRS ARDSLEY. No, but it looked as though the world would be a changed place when it stopped.

SYDNEY. It's funny when you think of it. Everything goes on in the same old way, except that we're all broke to the wide and a few hundred thousand fellows like me have had our chance of making a good job of life snatched away from us. [*Mrs Ardsley gives a sigh and makes an unhappy gesture. Sydney utters a little sardonic chuckle.*] Cheer up, mother. You must console yourself by thinking that you've got a hero for a son. M.C. and mentioned in despatches. No one can say I didn't do my bit.

MRS ARDSLEY. They're just coming.

[*Gwen Cedar and Ethel Bartlett come in from the garden. Ethel Bartlett, Mrs Ardsley's second daughter, is a handsome woman of thirty-five, with regular features and fine eyes. Gwen Cedar is fifty, a good deal painted, with dyed hair; she is too smartly dressed in a manner hardly becoming to her age. She has the mechanical brightness of a woman who is desperately hanging on to the remains of her youth.*]

ETHEL. The others are coming as soon as they've finished the set. Hulloo, Sydney.

SYDNEY. Hulloo.

GWEN. [*Shaking hands with him.*] How are you to-day, Sydney? You're looking very well.

SYDNEY. Oh, I'm all right, thanks.

GWEN. Busy as a bee as usual, I suppose. You're simply amazing.

MRS ARDSLEY. [*Trying to head her off.*] Let me give you some tea.

GWEN. I do admire you. I mean, you must have great strength of character.

SYDNEY. [*With a grin.*] A will of iron.

GWEN. I remember when I was ill last spring and they kept me in a darkened room for nearly a week, it was quite intolerable. But I kept on saying to myself, well, it's nothing compared to what poor Sydney has to put up with.

SYDNEY. And you were right.

MRS ARDSLEY. One lump of sugar?

GWEN. Oh, no, I never take sugar. It's Lent all the year round for me. [*Brightly attacking Sydney again.*] It's a marvel to me how you pass the time.

SYDNEY. Charming women like you are very sweet to me, and my sisters are good enough to play chess with me. I improve my mind by reading.

GWEN. Oh, yes, Braille. I love reading. I always read at least one novel a day. Of course I've got a head like a sieve. D'you know, it's often happened to me to read a novel right through and never remember till the end that I'd read it before. It always makes me so angry. I mean, it's such a waste of time.

SYDNEY. How's the farm, Ethel?

ETHEL. We're making the most of the fine weather.

GWEN. It must be so interesting, living on a farm. Making butter and all that sort of thing.

ETHEL. One's at it from morning till night. It keeps one from thinking.

GWEN. But of course you have people to do all the rough work for you.

ETHEL. What makes you think that?

GWEN. You don't mean to say you do it yourself. How on earth d'you keep your hands?

ETHEL. [*With a glance at them, smiling.*] I don't.

[*There is a sound of voices from the garden.*]

MRS ARDSLEY. Here are the others.

[*Her two daughters come in with the two men they have been playing with. These are Wilfred Cedar and Collie Stratton. Wilfred Cedar is a stout, elderly man, but well preserved, with a red face and grey, crisply curling hair. He is stout, jovial, breezy, and sensual. He is out to enjoy all the good things of life. Collie Stratton is between thirty-five and forty. He has been in the Royal Navy and has the rather school-boyish manner of those men who have never quite grown up. He has a pleasant, frank look. Eva is Mrs Ardsley's eldest daughter. She*]



*is thin and of a somewhat haggard appearance. She is very gentle, a trifle subdued, but she does not give you the impression of being at peace with herself. Behind the placidity is a strange restlessness. She is thirty-nine. Lois Ardsley is the youngest of the family. She is twenty-six, but the peaceful, monotonous life she has led has preserved her youth and she looks little more than twenty. She is gay and natural. She is a very pretty young woman, but what is even more attractive in her than her blue eyes and straight nose is the air she has of immense healthiness.*

LOIS. Tea. Tea. Tea.

WILFRED. By George, they made us run about. Hulloo, Sydney.

MRS ARDSLEY. How were you playing?

WILFRED. Lois and me against Eva and Collie.

EVA. Of course Wilfred's in a different class from us.

COLLIE. That forehand drive of yours is devilish.

WILFRED. I've had a lot of practice, you know, playing in tournaments on the Riviera and so on.

GWEN. Of course he was too old for singles, but a few years ago he was one of the best doubles players in Cannes.

WILFRED. [*Not too pleased.*] I don't know that I play any worse than I played a few years ago.

GWEN. Well, you can't expect to get across the court as you used to when you were young. I mean, that's silly.

WILFRED. Gwen always talks as if I was a hundred. What I say is, a woman's as old as she looks and a man as old as he feels.

SYDNEY. It has been said before.

MRS ARDSLEY. [*To Wilfred.*] How do you like your tea?

LOIS. Oh, mother, I'm sure they want a drink.

WILFRED. Clever girl.

MRS ARDSLEY. What would you like?

WILFRED. Well, a glass of beer sounds good to me. What about you, Collie?

COLLIE. Suits me.

EVA. I'll tell Gertrude.

MRS ARDSLEY. [*As Eva is going.*] Tell your father that if he wants any tea he'd better come now.

EVA. Very well. [*She goes into the house.*]

WILFRED. Damned convenient for your husband having his office in the house.

LOIS. He's got a private door so that he can slip away without the clients seeing him.

GWEN. Evie's looking a little tired, I think.

MRS ARDSLEY. She's been rather nervy lately. I've wanted her uncle to have a look at her, but she won't let him.

GWEN. So sad the man she was engaged to being killed in the war.

MRS ARDSLEY. They were very much in love with one another.

ETHEL. She's never really got over it, poor dear.

GWEN. Pity she never found any one else she liked.

MRS ARDSLEY. In a place like this she could hardly hope to.

By the end of the war there were very few young men left.

And girls were growing up all the time.

GWEN. I heard there *was* someone.

MRS ARDSLEY. Not very desirable. I believe he did ask her, but she refused him.

GWEN. I'm told he wasn't quite, quite. It's always a mistake to marry out of one's own class. It's never a success.

*[Gwen has dropped a brick. Ethel has married beneath her.]*

LOIS. Oh, what nonsense. As if that sort of thing mattered any more. It depends on the people, not on their class.

*[Gwen suddenly realizes what she has said, gives Ethel a hurried look and tries to make everything right.]*

GWEN. Oh, of course. I didn't mean that. All sorts of people keep shops nowadays and go in for poultry farming and things like that. I don't mind what a man is as long as he's a gentleman.

COLLIE. It's a relief to hear you say that as I run a garage.

GWEN. That's just what I mean. It doesn't matter your running a garage. After all you were in the navy and you commanded a destroyer.

SYDNEY. To say nothing of having the D.S.O. and the Legion of Honour.

WILFRED. In point of fact what made you go into the motor business when you were axed, Collie?

COLLIE. I had to do something. I was a pretty good mechanic. I got a bonus, you know, and I thought I might just as well put it into that as anything else.

WILFRED. I suppose you do pretty well out of the motor buses.

COLLIE. Lot of expenses, you know.

*[Gertrude comes out of the house with two tankards of beer on a tray.]*

WILFRED. Look what 's here.

*[He takes one of the tankards and takes a great pull at it. Eva comes back.]*

EVA. Father 's just coming. He wants to see you, Collie.

COLLIE. Oh, does he?

WILFRED. That doesn't look too good, old man. When a solicitor wants to see you it 's generally that he has something disagreeable to say to you.

LOIS. Hurry up and finish your beer and we 'll give them their revenge. It 'll be getting dark soon.

GWEN. Oh, are you going to play again, Wilfred? Don't you think it 's time we went home?

WILFRED. What 's the hurry? You take the car. I 'll have another set and I 'll walk back.

GWEN. Oh, if you 're not coming, I 'll wait.

WILFRED. *[Trying to hide his irritation behind his joviality.]* Oh, come on, you can trust me out of your sight just this once. I promise to be a good boy.

*[A little look passes between them. She stifles a sigh and smiles brightly.]*

GWEN. Oh, all right. A brisk walk won't do your figure any harm. *[She turns towards Mrs Ardsley to say good-bye.]*

MRS ARDSLEY. I 'll come as far as the door with you.

*[The two of them go out.]*

SYDNEY. Where 's my stick, Evie? *[She gives it to him and he gets up.]* I think I 'll totter down to the court and see how you all play.

ETHEL. I 'll come with you, shall I?

EVA. I think I 'd better get some fresh tea for father.

LOIS. Hurry up, then, or the light 'll be going.

EVA. I shan't be a minute. *[She goes into the house.]*

LOIS. What should we do in this house without Evie?

SYDNEY. What would Evie do without us? You can't sacrifice yourself unless there 's someone about whom you can sacrifice yourself for.

WILFRED. You 're a cynical bloke.

LOIS. *[With a smile.]* And ungrateful.

SYDNEY. Not at all. It 's jam for Evie to have an invalid to look after. If she could make me see by saying a magic word, d' you think she 'd say it? Not on your life. Nature destined her to be a saint and it 's damned lucky for her that I 'm around to give her the opportunity of earning a heavenly crown.



ETHEL. [*With a chuckle.*] Come on, give me your arm.

SYDNEY. [*Putting on a cockney accent.*] Spare a copper for a poor blind man, sir. [*They go out.*]

LOIS. I'll just go and hunt for that ball. I think I know more or less where it is.

WILFRED. I'd come with you if I weren't so lazy.

LOIS. No, stay there. You'll only wreck the flower-beds with your big feet.

WILFRED. I like that. I flatter myself not many men of my size have smaller feet than I have.

LOIS. Modest fellow, aren't you? Give me a shout when Evie comes. [*She disappears into the garden.*]

WILFRED. Good-looking girl that. Nice too. And she's got a head on her shoulders.

COLLIE. Plays a good game of tennis.

WILFRED. Funny she shouldn't have been snapped up before now. If I was a young fellow and single I shouldn't hesitate.

COLLIE. She hasn't got much chance here, poor thing. Who the devil is there she can marry in a place like this?

WILFRED. I wonder you don't have a cut in yourself.

COLLIE. I'm fifteen years older than she is. And I haven't got a bean.

WILFRED. Girls nowadays who live in the country have to take what they can get.

COLLIE. Nothing doing as far as I'm concerned.

WILFRED. [*With a shrewd look at him.*] Oh!

COLLIE. Why d' you want to know?

WILFRED. Only that she's a nice girl and I'd like to see her settled.

COLLIE. I say, old man, I suppose you wouldn't do me a favour.

WILFRED. Of course, I will, old boy. What is it?

COLLIE. Well, to tell you the truth, I'm in a bit of a hole.

WILFRED. Sorry to hear that. What's it all about?

COLLIE. Business has been rotten lately.

WILFRED. I know it has. And I don't know when things are going to improve. I can tell you I'm damned glad I got out when the going was good.

COLLIE. I expect you are.

WILFRED. Every one told me I was a fool to retire. But I smelt a rat. I said, no, I've worked a good many years and I've made a packet. Now I'm going to live like a gentleman. I sold out at the top of the market. Just in time.

COLLIE. Lucky.

WILFRED. Lucky be damned. Clever, I call it.

COLLIE. Look here, old man, I hate asking you, but I 'm terribly hard up just now. I should be awfully grateful if you could lend me a bit.

WILFRED. [*Very heartily.*] Why, my dear old boy, of course I will. I 'm always glad to oblige a friend. How much d' you want?

COLLIE. That 's awfully kind of you. Could you manage two hundred pounds?

WILFRED. Oh, I say, that 's real money. I thought you were going to say a tenner. Two hundred pounds is quite another story.

COLLIE. It 's not very much for you.

WILFRED. I 'm not made of money, you know. My investments have gone down like everybody else's. Believe me, I haven't got more than I can spend.

COLLIE. I 'm in a most awful jam.

WILFRED. Why don't you go to the bank?

COLLIE. I 'm overdrawn already. They won't lend me a bob.

WILFRED. But haven't you got any security?

COLLIE. Not that they 'll accept.

WILFRED. Then what d' you expect me to lend you the money on?

COLLIE. I 'll give you my word of honour to return it as soon as ever I can.

WILFRED. My dear old boy, you 're a damned good chap and a D.S.O. and all that sort of thing, but this is business.

COLLIE. You 've known me for six months now. You must know I 'm honest.

WILFRED. I took a furnished house down here for my wife's health, and when I heard you 'd been in the navy of course I came to you for my petrol and tyres and repairs. I know it 's hard for you fellows who 've been axed. I 've paid all my bills on the nail.

COLLIE. I 've given you good service.

WILFRED. I know you have. I 'm very sorry your garage hasn't proved a good proposition. If you 'd been a business man you 'd have known it was crazy to settle down in a little tin-pot place like this. But I really don't see that I 'm called upon to make you a present of two hundred pounds.

COLLIE. I 'm not asking it as a present.

WILFRED. It comes to the same thing. I 've lent dozens of

fellows money and they never pay it back. I think it's a bit thick to ask me to lend you a sum like that.

COLLIE. You don't think I like it. I tell you I'm absolutely up against it. It means life and death to me.

WILFRED. I'm awfully sorry, old boy, but there's nothing doing. . . . I wonder if Lois has found that ball yet.

*[He gets up and goes into the garden. Collie sits on dejectedly.]*

*In a moment Eva comes in with the teapot.*

EVA. What's the matter? You're looking terribly depressed.

COLLIE. *[Trying to collect himself.]* I'm sorry.

EVA. Are they waiting for us?

COLLIE. *[With a slight sigh.]* I suppose so.

EVA. Tell me what the matter is.

COLLIE. *[Forcing a smile.]* It wouldn't interest you.

EVA. Why do you say that? Don't you know that anything that concerns you interests me.

COLLIE. That's very sweet of you.

EVA. I suppose I'm rather reserved. It's difficult for me to show my feelings. I should like you to look upon me as a friend.

COLLIE. I do.

EVA. Tell me what it is then. Perhaps I can help you.

COLLIE. I'm afraid not. I think you've got troubles enough of your own without sharing mine.

EVA. You mean looking after Sydney. I don't look upon that as a trouble. I'm glad to do what I can for the poor boy. When I think of what the war did to him, it's only right that I should sacrifice myself.

COLLIE. It's very good of you, all the same.

EVA. You see, Ethel was married and Lois was so young. Mother isn't very strong. Looking after Sydney helped me to bear the loss of poor Ted.

COLLIE. That was the man you were engaged to?

EVA. Yes. I was terribly unhappy when he was killed. I'm afraid I was rather morbid about it. One can't afford to give in, can one? I mean, life is given to us, and it's our duty to make the best we can out of it.

COLLIE. *[Rather vaguely.]* Naturally one gets over everything in course of time.

EVA. I suppose one ought to consider oneself fortunate that one can. And I think a girl ought to marry, don't you? I mean, it's a woman's province to have a home of her own and children to look after.



COLLIE. Yes, I suppose it is. *[There is a moment's pause.]*

EVA. It's rather strange that you should never have married, Collie.

COLLIE. *[With a grin.]* I never had anything to marry on.

EVA. Oh, money isn't everything. A clever woman can manage on very little. *[Brightly.]* I must have a look round and see if I can't find someone to suit you.

COLLIE. I'm afraid I'm too old now.

EVA. Oh, what nonsense. You're just the same age as I am. Every woman loves a sailor. Between you and me and the gate-post I don't believe there's a girl here who wouldn't jump at the chance if you asked her.

COLLIE. *[A trifle embarrassed.]* I'm not likely to do that.

EVA. Are you waiting for her to ask you? That's wanting almost too much.

COLLIE. I suppose it is really.

EVA. After all, a nice girl can't do much more than show a man she's not indifferent to him and leave him to draw what conclusions he pleases.

COLLIE. I've got an awful headache. I wonder if you'd tell the others that I can't play tennis again to-day. Perhaps Ethel will make a four.

EVA. Oh, my dear, I am sorry. Of course you mustn't play. That's quite all right. *[Leonard Ardsley comes out from the house. He is a red-faced, hearty man of sixty-five, with blue eyes and white hair. He looks more like the old-fashioned sporting squire than the country solicitor. He is on familiar terms with the local gentry and in the season enjoys a day's shooting.]* Oh, there you are, father. We've all had tea.

ARDSLEY. I had somebody with me. *[With a nod to him.]* How are you, Stratton? Run along, Evie, I'll help myself. I want to have a word with our young friend.

EVA. Oh, all right. *[She goes out into the garden.]*

ARDSLEY. I've just seen Radley.

COLLIE. Yes.

ARDSLEY. I'm afraid I haven't got very good news for you.

COLLIE. He won't wait?

ARDSLEY. He can't wait.

COLLIE. Then what's to be done?

ARDSLEY. The only sensible thing is to file your petition.

COLLIE. It's ridiculous. It's only a matter of a hundred and eighty-seven pounds. I'm sure if I can hang on a little longer I can manage. When does Radley want to be paid?

ARDSLEY. The first of the month.

COLLIE. I've just got to get the money before then, that's all.

ARDSLEY. You've had a hard struggle and you've deserved to succeed. Believe me, no one will be sorrier than I if you're beaten. You know, you needn't worry about my fees. We'll forget about them.

COLLIE. That's very kind of you.

ARDSLEY. Not a bit of it. I think it's very tough on you fellows who've been kicked out of the navy. A man with your record. You put all your eggs in the one basket, didn't you?

COLLIE. Everything. If I go bust I haven't a shilling. I'll be thankful if I can get a job driving a motor bus.

ARDSLEY. [*Cheerily.*] Oh, I hope it won't come to that. It would be rather a come-down for a man who's commanded a destroyer and has all the ribands you have. [*Mrs Ardsley comes out of the house with Dr Prentice. He is a thin, elderly man with iron-grey hair, a stern face and searching eyes.*] Hulloo, Charlie.

PRENTICE. How are you? Oh, Stratton.

ARDSLEY. Just in time for a cup of tea. [*To Collie.*] Don't you bother about us if you want to go and play tennis.

COLLIE. No, I'm not playing any more. I'll hop it. Good-bye, Mrs Ardsley.

MRS ARDSLEY. Are you going already?

COLLIE. I'm afraid I must.

MRS ARDSLEY. Well, good-bye. Come again soon.

COLLIE. Good-bye.

[*He nods to the two men and goes out through the house.*]

MRS ARDSLEY. [*To Prentice.*] Will you have some tea?

PRENTICE. No, thank you.

MRS ARDSLEY. Collie looks rather worried. Is anything the matter?

PRENTICE. I'm told his garage isn't doing any too well.

ARDSLEY. It's the same old story. All these ex-officers. They go into business without knowing anything about it. And by the time they've learnt how many beans make five they've lost every bob they'd got.

MRS ARDSLEY. It's very hard on them.

ARDSLEY. Of course it is. But what's to be done about it? The nation can't afford itself the luxury of supporting an army of officers it has no use for.

PRENTICE. The unfortunate thing is that the lives they've led

in the service has unfitted them for the rough and tumble of ordinary life.

ARDSLEY. Well, I must get back to my office. Is this just a friendly call, Charlie, or are you hunting a patient? Personally, I am in robust health, thank you very much.

PRENTICE. [*With grim humour.*] That 's what you say. I expect your blood pressure 's awful.

ARDSLEY. Get along with you. I 've never had a day's illness in my life.

PRENTICE. Well, don't blame me if you have a stroke. I always have my suspicions about a man who looks as well as you do.

MRS ARDSLEY. As a matter of fact, I wanted to have a little talk with Charlie about Eva. She 's been very jumpy lately.

ARDSLEY. Oh, that 's only your fancy, my dear. She 's getting a little old maidish. The great thing is to give her occupation. Fortunately Sydney gives her plenty to do.

PRENTICE. Sydney keeping pretty fit?

MRS ARDSLEY. As fit as can be expected.

ARDSLEY. Poor old Sydney. The only thing we can do is to make things as easy for him as we can. It 's been a great blow to me. I was hoping he 'd go into the business. He 'd have been able to take a lot of the work off my hands now. I 've paid for the war all right.

PRENTICE. [*With a twinkle in his eye.*] He has too, in a way.

ARDSLEY. Of course. But he 's got used to it. Invalids do, you know. Well, it 's lucky I 've got my health and strength. Anyhow, I must go back and do a job of work.

[*He nods to the doctor and goes into the house.*]

PRENTICE. Leonard 's a wonderful fellow. He always looks at the bright side of things.

MRS ARDSLEY. It 's a strength.

PRENTICE. You 've spoilt him.

MRS ARDSLEY. I 've loved him.

PRENTICE. I wonder why.

MRS ARDSLEY. [*With a smile.*] I can't imagine. I suppose because he can never see further than the end of his nose and I 've always had to take care that he didn't trip over the obvious and hurt himself.

PRENTICE. You 've been a good wife and mother, Charlotte. There aren't many left like you now.

MRS ARDSLEY. Times are difficult. I think one should make allowances for all these young things who are faced with problems that we never dreamed of.



PRENTICE. What did you want to say to me about Evie?

MRS ARDSLEY. I want her to come and see you. She's been losing weight. I'm rather uneasy about her.

PRENTICE. I dare say she wants a holiday. I'll have a talk to her. But you know I'm more concerned about you. I don't like this pain you've been complaining of.

MRS ARDSLEY. I don't think it's very important. It's just pain, you know. I suppose most women of my age have it now and then.

PRENTICE. I've been thinking about it. I want you to let me make a proper examination.

MRS ARDSLEY. I'd hate it.

PRENTICE. I'm not a bad doctor, you know, even though I am your brother.

MRS ARDSLEY. You can't do anything for me. When the pain gets bad I take some aspirin. It's no good making a fuss.

PRENTICE. If you won't let me examine you I shall go to Leonard.

MRS ARDSLEY. No, don't do that. He'll have a fit.

PRENTICE. Come along, then.

MRS ARDSLEY. Now?

PRENTICE. Yes, now.

MRS ARDSLEY. I disliked you when you were a little boy and used to make me bow to you, and every year that has passed since then has made me dislike you more.

PRENTICE. You're a wrinkled old hag, Charlotte, and women ought to be young and pretty, but upon my word there's something about you that I can't help liking.

MRS ARDSLEY. [*Smiling.*] You fool.

[*Lois and Wilfred Cedar saunter in from the garden.*]

LOIS. Hulloa, Uncle Charlie. Tennis is off. Evie says Collie's got a bad head.

MRS. ARDSLEY. He's gone home.

PRENTICE. I'm just taking your mother off to have a look at her.

LOIS. Oh, mother, you're not ill?

MRS ARDSLEY. No, darling, of course not. Uncle Charlie's an old fuss-pot.

[*They go into the house.*]

WILFRED. D'you want me to take myself off?

LOIS. No, sit down. Would you like a drink?

WILFRED. Not at the moment. Let's have a talk.

LOIS. The days are drawing in. Oh, how I hate the winter.

WILFRED. It must be pretty grim down here.

LOIS. The wind! When d'you go south?

WILFRED. Oh, not for another month.

LOIS. Shall you take a house here again next year?

WILFRED. I don't know. Would you like me to?

LOIS. Naturally. It's awful when there's no one at the Manor.

WILFRED. D'you know, you're a very pretty girl.

LOIS. It doesn't do me much good.

WILFRED. I wonder you don't go on the stage.

LOIS. One can't go on the stage just like that.

WILFRED. With your looks you could always get a job in the chorus.

LOIS. Can you see father's face if I suggested it?

WILFRED. You haven't got much chance of marrying in a place like this.

LOIS. Oh, I don't know. Someone may turn up.

WILFRED. I believe you'd be a success on the stage.

LOIS. One has to have training. At least a year. I'd have to live in London. It costs money.

WILFRED. I'll pay.

LOIS. You? What *do* you mean?

WILFRED. Well, I'm not exactly a poor man. I can't bear the thought of your going to seed in a rotten little hole like this.

LOIS. Don't be silly. How can I take money from you?

WILFRED. Why not? I mean, it's absurd at this time of day to be conventional.

LOIS. What do you think Gwen would say?

WILFRED. She needn't know.

LOIS. Anyhow, it's too late. I'm twenty-six. One has to start at eighteen. . . . It's extraordinary how the years slip by. I didn't realize I was grown up till I was twenty. I vaguely thought of becoming a typist or a hospital nurse. But I never got beyond thinking of it. I suppose I thought I'd marry.

WILFRED. What'll you do if you don't?

LOIS. Become an old maid. Be the solace of my parents' declining years.

WILFRED. I don't think much of that.

LOIS. I'm not complaining, you know. Life's so monotonous here. Time slips by without your noticing it.

WILFRED. Has no one ever asked you to marry him?

LOIS. Oh, yes. An assistant of Uncle Charlie's did. An odious little man. And there was a widower with three children and no money. I didn't think that much catch.

WILFRED. I don't blame you.

LOIS. What made you suggest that just now? Paying for my training?

WILFRED. Oh, I don't know. I was sorry for you.

LOIS. You don't give me the impression of a philanthropist.

WILFRED. Well, if you must know, I'm crazy about you.

LOIS. And you thought I'd show my gratitude in the usual way.

WILFRED. I never thought about it.

LOIS. Oh, come off it.

WILFRED. You're not angry with me? It's not my fault if I'm just dotty about you.

LOIS. After all, you are old enough to be my father.

WILFRED. I know. You needn't rub it in.

LOIS. I think it's just as well that you're going away in a month.

WILFRED. I'd do anything in the world for you, Lois.

LOIS. Thank you very much, but there's nothing you can do.

WILFRED. You don't know what you're talking about. You're just mouldering away here. I can give you a better time than you've ever dreamed of. Paris. You've never been there, have you? By God, you'd go mad over the clothes. You could buy as many as you liked. Cannes and Monte. And what price Venice? Gwen and I spent the summer before last at the Lido. It was a riot, I can tell you.

LOIS. You're a monstrous old man. If I were a properly brought up young woman I should ring for a flunkey and have you shown the door.

WILFRED. I'm not a bad sort. I'm sure I could make you happy. You know, you could turn me round your little finger.

LOIS. [*Looking at her fingers.*] Blazing with jewels?

WILFRED. Rather.

LOIS. [*With a laugh.*] You fool.

WILFRED. God, how I love you. It's a relief to be able to say it at all events. I can't make out how you never guessed it.

LOIS. It never occurred to me. Does Gwen know?

WILFRED. Oh, no, she never sees anything. She hasn't got the brains of a louse.

LOIS. You're not going to make a nuisance of yourself, are you?

WILFRED. No, I'm going to leave you to think about it.

LOIS. That's not necessary. There's nothing doing. I can tell you that at once. Take care, there's someone coming.

[*Howard Bartlett comes in from the house. He is a big, fine man of forty, somewhat on the stout side, but still with the*



*dashing good looks that had attracted Ethel during the war. He wears rather shabby plus-fours and a golf coat of rather too loud a pattern. He is altogether a little showy. He does not drop his aitches often, but his accent is slightly common. At the moment he is not quite sober. You would not say he was drunk, but the liquor he has had during the day has made him jovial.*

HOWARD. Well, here I am.

LOIS. Hulloa, Howard.

HOWARD. I've caught you, have I? What are you doing with my sister-in-law, Cedar? Eh? You be careful of that man, Lois. He's up to no good.

LOIS. [*With a laugh.*] Oh, shut up, Howard.

HOWARD. I know him. He's just the kind of fellow to lead a poor girl astray.

LOIS. [*Coolly.*] Howard, you've had a couple.

HOWARD. I know I have, and I'm feeling all the better for it. [*Harking back.*] Don't you listen to a word he says. He's a wicked old man.

WILFRED. Go on. I like flattery.

HOWARD. You know, his intentions aren't honourable. [*To Wilfred.*] Now, as one man to another, are your intentions honourable?

WILFRED. If you put it like that . . .

HOWARD. One man to another, mind you.

WILFRED. I don't mind telling you they're not.

HOWARD. There, Lois, what did I tell you?

LOIS. At all events I know where I am now.

HOWARD. Don't say I didn't warn you. When you're walking the streets of London, with a baby on your arm and no home to go to, don't say, Howard never warned me.

LOIS. Ethel's waiting for you, Howard. She wants to go home.

HOWARD. No place like home and home's a woman's place.

LOIS. You'll find her somewhere in the garden.

HOWARD. A good woman. You always know where to find her. She's not one of your gad-about. One of the best. And a lady, mind you. [*To Wilfred.*] I don't mind telling you I'm not a gentleman by birth.

WILFRED. Aren't you?

HOWARD. The king made me a gentleman. His Majesty. I may be only a farmer now, but I've been an officer and a gentleman. And don't you forget it.

LOIS. You're drivelling, Howard.

HOWARD. What I mean to say is, leave the girl alone, Cedar.  
A poor motherless child. An innocent village maiden. I  
appeal to your better nature.

WILFRED. D' you know what 's the matter with you, Bartlett?

HOWARD. I do not.

WILFRED. You 're tight.

HOWARD. Me? I 'm as sober as a judge. How many drinks  
d' you think I 've had to-day?

WILFRED. More than you can count.

HOWARD. On the fingers of one hand, maybe. [*With triumph.*]  
But not on the fingers of two. It wants more than that to  
make me tight.

WILFRED. You 're getting older. You can't carry your liquor  
like you used to.

HOWARD. Do you know, when I was an officer and a gentleman,  
I could drink a bottle of whisky at a sitting and not turn a hair.  
[*He sees Mrs Ardsley and Dr Prentice coming through the  
drawing-room.*] Here 's the doctor. We 'll ask him.

[*They come out.*]

MRS ARDSLEY. Oh, Howard, I didn't know you were here.

HOWARD. As large as life.

PRENTICE. Been in to Stanbury?

HOWARD. Market-day to-day.

PRENTICE. Do any business?

HOWARD. Business is rotten. Just wasting my time, I am.  
Farming 's gone all to hell.

MRS ARDSLEY. You look tired, Howard. Would you like me to  
have a cup of tea made for you?

HOWARD. Tired? I 'm never tired. [*Pointing to Wilfred.*] Do  
you know what this chap says? He says I 'm tight.

WILFRED. I was only joking.

HOWARD. [*Solemnly.*] I 'm going to get a professional opinion.  
Uncle Charlie and Dr Prentice, as one man to another, tell me,  
am I tight? Don't mind hurting my feelings. I 'll bear it.  
whatever you say, like an officer and a gentleman. 'Shun.

PRENTICE. I 've seen men a lot tighter.

HOWARD. You examine me. I want to get to the bottom of  
this. Tell me to say British Constitution.

PRENTICE. Say British Constitution.

HOWARD. I 've already said it. You can't catch me that way.  
Now what about the chalk line?

PRENTICE. What about it?

HOWARD. Look here, do you want me to teach you your

business? Draw a chalk line and make me walk along it. That'll prove it. Go on. Draw a chalk line. Draw it straight, mind you.

PRENTICE. I don't happen to have any chalk.

HOWARD. You haven't got any chalk?

PRENTICE. No.

HOWARD. Then I shall never know if I'm tight or not.

*[Sydney comes from the garden, accompanied by Ethel. A moment later Eva follows them.]*

ETHEL. Howard. Had a good day?

SYDNEY. Hulloo.

HOWARD. Yes, I met a lot of good chaps, white men, fine upstanding fellows. Straight as a die. Pick of the British nation.

*[Ethel gives a little start as she realizes that he is tipsy, but pretends to notice nothing.]*

ETHEL. *[Brightly.]* How was business?

HOWARD. Rotten. Everybody's broke. Farming—what a game! What I ask you is, why the Government don't do something.

ETHEL. Well, they've promised to.

HOWARD. Are they going to keep their promises? You know they're not, I know they're not, and they know they're not.

ETHEL. Then the only thing is to grin and bear it as we've grinned and borne it all these years.

HOWARD. Are we the backbone of the country or not?

SYDNEY. I've never heard a Member of Parliament who didn't say so.

HOWARD. *[About to get angry.]* I know what I'm talking about.

ETHEL. *[Soothingly.]* Of course you do.

HOWARD. Then why does he contradict me?

SYDNEY. I wasn't contradicting you. I was agreeing with you.

HOWARD. *[Mollified.]* Were you, old boy? Well, that's damned nice of you. You're a sport. I've always liked you, Sydney.

SYDNEY. Good.

HOWARD. I was born on a farm. Born and bred. Except when I was an officer and a gentleman, I've been a farmer all me life. Shall I tell you what's wrong with farming?

SYDNEY. No.

HOWARD. No?



SYDNEY. No.

HOWARD. All right, I won't.

*[He sinks back, comatose, into his chair. At that moment Gwen Cedar comes in from the drawing-room. She has a fixed bright smile on her face.]*

MRS ARDSLEY. *[A little surprised.]* Oh, Gwen!

GWEN. I'm like a bad penny. I was just passing your door and the maid told me Wilfred was still here, so I thought I'd step in for him.

MRS ARDSLEY. Of course. *[Wilfred's face is sullen with anger.]*

WILFRED. What's the idea, Gwen?

GWEN. I didn't think you'd want to walk all that way.

WILFRED. You said you were going home.

GWEN. I remembered I had some things to do.

WILFRED. I prefer to walk.

GWEN. *[With a bright smile.]* Why?

WILFRED. Good God, surely I don't have to explain why I want a walk.

GWEN. It seems so silly when the car is there.

WILFRED. I need the exercise.

GWEN. You've had lots of exercise.

WILFRED. You're making a fool of yourself, Gwen.

GWEN. How rude you are, Wilfred.

WILFRED. It's maddening that you can never trust me out of your sight for ten minutes.

GWEN. *[Still very bright.]* You're so fascinating. I'm always afraid some bold bad woman will be running after you.

WILFRED. *[Surly.]* Come on, then. Let's go.

GWEN. *[Turning to shake hands with Mrs Ardsley.]* Tiresome creatures men are, aren't they?

WILFRED. Good-bye, Mrs Ardsley. Thank you very much.

GWEN. It's been a lovely afternoon. So kind of you to ask us.

MRS ARDSLEY. I hope you'll come again very soon.

*[Wilfred gives a sullen nod to the others. He waits at the window for his wife and when she flutters out he follows her.]*

SYDNEY. What's the trouble?

LOIS. What a fool of a woman.

SYDNEY. I bet he gives her hell in the car.

*[Howard gives a little snore. He has fallen into a drunken sleep. Ethel gives a start.]*

ETHEL. Listen to Howard. He's tired out, poor dear. One of the cows has something the matter with her and he was up at five this morning.

MRS ARDSLEY. Let him sleep for a little, Ethel. Sydney, hadn't you better come in. It's beginning to get quite chilly.

SYDNEY. All right.

*[Mrs Ardsley, Dr Prentice, and Sydney go into the house.]*

PRENTICE. *[As they go.]* How has the neuralgia been lately?

SYDNEY. Bearable, you know.

*[Mrs Ardsley's three daughters are left with the drunken, sleeping man.]*

ETHEL. Poor Howard, he works so hard. I'm glad to see him get a few minutes' rest.

EVA. You work hard too and you get no rest.

ETHEL. I love it. I'm so interested in it, and Howard's a wonderful person to work with.

EVA. Would you marry him over again if you could put the clock back?

ETHEL. Why, of course. He's been a wonderful husband.

*[Mrs Ardsley comes to the door of the drawing-room.]*

MRS ARDSLEY. Evie, Sydney would like a game of chess.

EVA. All right, mother. I'll come.

*[Mrs Ardsley withdraws into the room. Eva gets up.]*

LOIS. Don't you hate chess?

EVA. I loathe it.

ETHEL. Poor Evie.

EVA. It's one of the few games Sydney can play. I'm glad to do anything I can to make life a little easier for him.

ETHEL. That horrible war.

LOIS. And the chances are that it'll go on like this till we're all weary old women.

*[Howard gives another snore.]*

EVA. I'll go.

*[She makes her way into the house.]*

LOIS. At all events you've got your children.

ETHEL. I've got nothing to complain of.

*[Lois gets up and bending over Ethel kisses her on the cheek. Then she saunters away into the darkening garden. Ethel looks at her husband and the tears flow down her cheeks. She takes out her handkerchief and nervously pulls it about as she tries to control herself.]*

CURTAIN

## ACT II

*The scene represents the dining-room of the Ardsleys' house. It is furnished in an old-fashioned style, with a mahogany sideboard, mahogany chairs with leather seats and backs, and a solid mahogany dining-table. On each side of the fireplace are two easy chairs, one with arms for the master of the house and one without for the mistress. On the walls are large framed engravings of academy pictures. There is a bow window, looking on the High Street, and here Eva and Sydney are seated, playing chess. Luncheon is just over and Gertrude, the maid, is clearing away. Mrs Ardsley is sitting in her easy chair reading the paper.*

EVA. Uncle Charlie's car has just driven up.

SYDNEY. Do attend to the game, Evie.

EVA. It's your move.

MRS ARDSLEY. You'd better go and open the door, Gertrude.

GERTRUDE. Very good, ma'am. *[She goes out.]*

EVA. He's been here rather often lately.

MRS ARDSLEY. You know what he is. He will fuss.

SYDNEY. You're not ill, mother, are you?

MRS ARDSLEY. No, only old.

SYDNEY. I doubt whether even Uncle Charlie can do much about that.

MRS ARDSLEY. That's what I tell him.

*[Gertrude shows in Dr Prentice.]*

GERTRUDE. Dr Prentice.

*[He comes in, kisses Mrs Ardsley and waves to the others.]*

PRENTICE. How are you? Don't let me disturb your game.

SYDNEY. D'you want us to leave you?

PRENTICE. No. This isn't a doctor's visit. I'm only stopping a minute.

SYDNEY. Queen's knight to queen's bishop's third.

*[Eva moves the piece he indicates. The doctor sits down and holds out his hands to the fire.]*

PRENTICE. Chilly to-day.

MRS ARDSLEY. Have you arranged something?



PRENTICE. Yes, three o'clock to-morrow afternoon.

MRS ARDSLEY. That 'll suit very well.

PRENTICE. Where 's Lois?

MRS ARDSLEY. She 's playing golf. She thought it would be a rush to get back, so she lunched at the club house.

SYDNEY. She 's playing with Wilfred. She said she 'd bring him back with her, and Collie 's coming in so that we can have a rubber or two of bridge.

MRS ARDSLEY. Oh, that 'll be nice for you, Sydney.

SYDNEY. Is there a fire in the drawing-room?

MRS ARDSLEY. I 'll have one lit. Gertrude.

*[Gertrude has been clearing the rest of the things away and now has finished.]*

GERTRUDE. Very good, ma'am.

*[She puts the table-cloth away in the sideboard drawer and goes out.]*

MRS ARDSLEY. *[To Dr Prentice.]* Can't you stay and have a man's four.

PRENTICE. I wish I could. I 'm too busy.

EVA. King's knight to queen's third.

SYDNEY. That 's an idiotic move, Evie.

EVA. There 's no reason why I shouldn't make it if I want to.

SYDNEY. You must protect your bishop.

EVA. Play your own game and let me play mine.

MRS ARDSLEY. Evie.

SYDNEY. You won't look ahead.

EVA. *[Violently.]* Good God, don't I spend my life looking ahead. And a damned cheerful prospect it is.

SYDNEY. My dear, what on earth 's the matter with you?

EVA. *[Regaining her self-control.]* Oh, nothing. I 'm sorry. I 'll protect my bishop. Queen's bishop's pawn to bishop's fourth.

SYDNEY. I 'm afraid that 's not a very good move.

EVA. It 'll do.

SYDNEY. There 's not the least use playing chess unless you 're prepared to give it some attention.

EVA. Oh, can't you stop nagging. It 's enough to drive one insane.

SYDNEY. I didn't mean to nag. I won't say another word.

EVA. Oh, I 'm sick of it.

*[She takes the board and throws all the pieces on the floor.]*

MRS ARDSLEY. Evie.

EVA. Damn it. Damn it. Damn it.

MRS ARDSLEY. Evie, what's the matter with you? You mustn't lose your temper because you're losing a game. That's childish.

EVA. As if I cared whether I lost or won. I hate the filthy game.

PRENTICE. [*Soothingly.*] I think it's very boring myself.

MRS ARDSLEY. Sydney has so few amusements.

EVA. Why should I be sacrificed all the time?

SYDNEY. [*With an amused smile.*] My dear, we thought you liked it.

EVA. I'm sick of being a drudge.

MRS ARDSLEY. I'm sorry, I never knew you looked at it like that. I thought you wanted to do everything you could for Sydney.

EVA. I'm very sorry he's blind. But it's not my fault. I'm not responsible for the war. He ought to go into a home.

MRS ARDSLEY. Oh, how cruel. How callous.

EVA. He took his chance like the rest of them. He's lucky not to have been killed.

SYDNEY. That of course is a matter of opinion.

EVA. It's monstrous that he should try to prevent any one else from having a good time.

MRS ARDSLEY. I thought it was a privilege to be able to do what we could to make life easier for him when he gave so much for us. And I felt that it wasn't only for him we were doing it, but also for all those others who, for our sakes, and for what at least they thought was honour, have sacrificed so much of what makes life happy and good to live.

EVA. I've given enough. I gave the man I was going to marry. I adored him. I might have had a home of my own and children. I never had another chance. And now . . . now. Oh, I'm so unhappy.

[*Bursting into tears, she rushes out of the room. There is a moment's awkward pause.*]

MRS ARDSLEY. What is the matter with her?

SYDNEY. She wants a man, that's all.

MRS ARDSLEY. Oh, Sydney, don't. That's horrible.

SYDNEY. But not unnatural.

MRS ARDSLEY. You mustn't take any notice of what she said to you.

SYDNEY. [*With an indulgent smile.*] Oh, my dear, I knew it already. The day's long past since I was a wounded hero for whom nothing was good enough. Fifteen years is a long time.

MRS ARDSLEY. If you could bear it there's no reason why others shouldn't.

SYDNEY. It was easier for me, you know. Being blind is an occupation in itself. It's astonishing how quickly the time passes. But of course it's hard on the others. At first it gives them a sort of exaltation to look after you, then it becomes a habit and they take you as a matter of course, but in the end, human nature being what it is, you become just a damned bore.

MRS ARDSLEY. You'll never be a bore to me, Sydney.

SYDNEY. [*Affectionately.*] I know. You've got that queer, incomprehensible thing that's called the mother instinct.

MRS ARDSLEY. I can't live for ever. It was a comfort to me to think that you'd always be safe with Evie.

SYDNEY. [*Almost gaily.*] Oh, don't bother about me, mother. I shall be all right. They say suffering ennobles. It hasn't ennobled me. It's made me sly and cunning. Evie says I'm selfish. I am. But I'm damned artful. I know how to get people to do things for me by working on their sympathy. Evie'll settle down. I shall be as safe as a house.

MRS ARDSLEY. Her not marrying and all that. It seemed so natural that she should look after you. Ethel's got her husband and children. Lois is so much younger. She doesn't understand. She's hard.

SYDNEY. [*With a good-natured shrug of the shoulders.*] Oh, I don't know. She's got the healthy, normal selfishness of youth. There's no harm in that. She doesn't see why she should be bothered with me, and she damned well isn't going to. I don't blame her. I know exactly where I am with her.

MRS ARDSLEY. I suppose I ought to go to Evie.

PRENTICE. I'd leave her alone for a little longer.

[*Gertrude comes in with a note.*]

GERTRUDE. Mrs Cedar asked me to give you this, ma'am.

MRS ARDSLEY. Oh. [*She opens the letter and reads it.*] Is she in the drawing-room?

GERTRUDE. No, ma'am. She's waiting in her car.

MRS ARDSLEY. Ask her to come in.

GERTRUDE. Very good, ma'am.

[*Gertrude goes out.*]

MRS ARDSLEY. How very strange.

PRENTICE. What is it?

MRS ARDSLEY. It's from Gwen. She asks if she can see me alone for a few minutes.



SYDNEY. I'll get out then.

*[He rises, takes his stick and stumps out of the room.]*

PRENTICE. I'll go, too.

MRS ARDSLEY. I wonder what she wants.

PRENTICE. Probably an address or something.

MRS ARDSLEY. She could have telephoned.

PRENTICE. Am I right in thinking she's a very silly woman?

MRS ARDSLEY. Quite right.

*[Dr Prentice has been watching Sydney go and as soon as the door is closed on him he changes his manner.]*

PRENTICE. I've had a long talk with Murray.

MRS ARDSLEY. I hate this consultation that you've forced me into.

PRENTICE. My dear, it's essential. I don't want to alarm you, but I must tell you I'm not satisfied with your condition.

MRS ARDSLEY. Oh, well. It's at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon?

PRENTICE. Yes. He's promised to ring me up after he's seen you.

MRS ARDSLEY. *[Giving him her hand.]* You're very nice to me.

PRENTICE. *[Kissing her cheek.]* I'm very fond of you.

*[He goes out. In a minute Gertrude shows Gwen Cedar into the room, and after announcing her, goes out.]*

GERTRUDE. Mrs Cedar.

MRS ARDSLEY. How d' you do.

GWEN. I hope you don't think it very strange my sending in a note like that. I simply had to see you.

MRS ARDSLEY. Do sit down. We shan't be disturbed.

GWEN. I thought I'd better talk it over with you. I mean, I though it only fair to you.

MRS ARDSLEY. Yes?

GWEN. I think I'd better come straight to the point.

MRS ARDSLEY. *[With a little smile.]* It's always a good plan.

GWEN. You know that I'm Wilfred's second wife.

MRS ARDSLEY. No, I didn't.

GWEN. He's my second husband. We fell very much in love with one another. And there were divorce proceedings. We've been married for twelve years. It's all so long ago, I didn't see any reason to say anything about it when we came down here.

MRS ARDSLEY. It was nobody's business but your own.

GWEN. We've been awfully happy together. It's been a great success.

MRS ARDSLEY. I imagine he's a very easy man to get on with.

GWEN. Of course he's always been very attractive to women.

MRS ARDSLEY. That's a thing I'm no judge about.

GWEN. He's got a way with him that takes them. And he pays them all kinds of little attentions that flatter them. But of course it doesn't mean anything.

MRS ARDSLEY. It seldom does.

GWEN. All women don't know that. It's the kind of thing that's quite likely to turn a girl's head. It would be silly to take him seriously. After all he's a married man and I would never divorce him whatever he did. Never.

MRS ARDSLEY. My dear, you said you were coming straight to the point. Aren't you beating about the bush a good deal?

GWEN. Don't you know what I mean?

MRS ARDSLEY. I haven't an idea.

GWEN. I'm very relieved to hear it.

MRS ARDSLEY. Won't you explain?

GWEN. You won't be angry with me?

MRS ARDSLEY. I shouldn't think so.

GWEN. He's been paying a lot of attention to your Lois.

MRS ARDSLEY. [*With a chuckle.*] Oh, my dear, don't be so ridiculous.

GWEN. I know he's attracted by her.

MRS ARDSLEY. How can you be so silly?

GWEN. They're together all the time.

MRS ARDSLEY. Nonsense. They play tennis and golf together. They're playing golf now. There are very few men for your husband to play with during the week. It's been nice for both of them. You don't mean to say you're jealous of that?

GWEN. But you see, I know he's madly in love with her.

MRS ARDSLEY. Oh, my dear, that's only fancy.

GWEN. How do you know that she isn't in love with him?

MRS ARDSLEY. He's old enough to be her father.

GWEN. What does that matter?

MRS ARDSLEY. A lot, I should say. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you know, a girl of Lois's age looks upon you and me, your husband and mine, as older than God.

GWEN. It isn't as if there were a lot of men here. A girl can't pick and choose in a place like this.

MRS ARDSLEY. Now I'm afraid I think you're not being very polite.

GWEN. I'm sorry. I don't mean to be rude. I'm so utterly miserable.

MRS ARDSLEY. [*With kindness.*] You poor dear. I'm sure you're mistaken. And in any case you're going away soon and that'll end it.

GWEN. [*Quickly.*] Then you think there's something to end?

MRS ARDSLEY. No, no. End your fear, I mean. I know very little about men like your husband. I dare say men of that age are often rather taken by bright young things. I think a sensible wife just shrugs her shoulders and laughs. Her safety is that the bright young things look upon her husband as an old fogey.

GWEN. Oh, I hope you're right. If you only knew the agony I've been through since I found out.

MRS ARDSLEY. I'm sure I'm right. And if there is any truth in what you think, I'm convinced that a fortnight after you've left here he'll have forgotten all about her.

*[She gets up to put an end to the conversation. Gwen rises too. She glances out of the window and sees a car stopping at the door.]*

GWEN. Here they are.

MRS ARDSLEY. [*Looking out of window.*] Who? Oh, your husband and Lois.

GWEN. He's coming in.

MRS ARDSLEY. He promised Sydney to play bridge. You don't object to that, do you?

GWEN. I don't want him to see me. He'll think I'm spying on him. He'll be furious.

MRS ARDSLEY. He won't come in here. He'll go into the drawing-room.

GWEN. You won't say anything to Lois, will you? I don't want to put her back up.

MRS ARDSLEY. Of course I won't say anything. I'm sure she's absolutely unconscious of what you've been talking about. It would only make her shy and uncomfortable.

GWEN. I'll slip away the moment the coast is clear.

*[The door is burst open and Lois comes in. She is radiant with health and spirits.]*

LOIS. Hulloo! Are you here, Gwen?

GWEN. Yes, your mother wanted to see me about the sale of work. I'm just going.

LOIS. Wilfred is here.

GWEN. Is he? Give him my love and tell him not to be late for dinner. You're going to play bridge, aren't you?



LOIS. Yes. Collie and Howard are coming. They'll have a man's four.

GWEN. Wilfred says your brother plays just as well as if he could see.

LOIS. Yes, it's rather marvellous. Of course we have special cards.

GWEN. [*Catching sight of a pearl necklace Lois has on.*] Pretty chain that is you're wearing. I've never seen it before.

LOIS. [*Instinctively putting her hand to her neck and fingering the beads.*] I bought it the other day when I went into Stanbury.

GWEN. How extravagant of you. I didn't know any one could afford to buy pearls now.

LOIS. It only cost a pound.

GWEN. Aren't they real?

LOIS. Of course not. How could they be?

GWEN. [*Going up to Lois and feeling the pearls.*] I think I know something about pearls. I would have sworn they were real.

LOIS. I wish they were.

GWEN. It's the most wonderful imitation I've ever seen.

LOIS. They do make them marvellously now. I wonder any one bothers to have real pearls at all.

*[Gwen is taken aback. She still looks at the pearls doubtfully, Then she makes an effort over herself.]*

GWEN. Good-bye, Mrs Ardsley. I'll have everything ready in good time.

MRS ARDSLEY. Good-bye, my dear. Lois will see you out.

*[Gwen and Lois go out. Mrs Ardsley is left reflective. She is a little puzzled. Lois comes in again.]*

MRS ARDSLEY. Lois dear, I've been thinking you looked rather peaked. Don't you think it would be a good idea if you went to stay at Aunt Emily's for a week or two?

LOIS. I should hate it.

MRS ARDSLEY. She does love having you there.

LOIS. It's so incredibly boring.

MRS ARDSLEY. You'll have to go before the end of the year. Much better go now and get it over.

LOIS. I loathe the idea.

MRS ARDSLEY. Think about it a little. I can't have you not looking your best, you know, or I shall never get you off my hands. [*She goes out. Her voice is heard through the still open door.*] Oh, here's Collie. You'll find Sydney in the drawing-room. [*As Collie passes the door he sees Lois.*]

COLLIE. Hulloo, Lois.

LOIS. You're early.

*[He pauses at the door.]*

COLLIE. I had an appointment with your father, but he's had to go out. I've left a message with the clerk to say I'm here when I'm wanted.

LOIS. Oh, good.

COLLIE. I'll go along to the drawing-room.

LOIS. Right-ho.

*[He passes on. Lois goes to the looking-glass and looks again at the little string round her neck. She feels the pearls. Wilfred's voice is heard: 'Lois.']*

LOIS. Hulloo.

WILFRED. *[Still outside.]* Where are you?

LOIS. In the dining-room.

*[He comes to the door.]*

WILFRED. As Collie's here why shouldn't we start?

LOIS. Howard's coming.

WILFRED. I know. But there's no reason why you shouldn't play a rubber or two before he does.

LOIS. Come in a minute, will you.

WILFRED. Why?

LOIS. Shut the door.

WILFRED. *[Closing the door behind him.]* It's shut.

LOIS. These pearls you gave me, they are false, aren't they?

WILFRED. Of course.

LOIS. How much did they cost?

WILFRED. I told you. A pound.

LOIS. Gwen's just been here.

WILFRED. Why?

LOIS. Oh, I don't know. She came to see mother about the sale of work.

WILFRED. Oh, is that all? She's been very funny lately.

LOIS. She says they're real.

WILFRED. What does she know about it?

LOIS. She says she knows a great deal. She has pearls of her own.

WILFRED. And a pretty packet they cost me.

LOIS. Is she right?

WILFRED. *[Smiling.]* I wouldn't swear she wasn't.

LOIS. Why did you say they were false?

WILFRED. I didn't think you'd take them if you thought they were real.

LOIS. Naturally.

*[She puts her fingers to the clasp.]*

WILFRED. What are you going to do?

LOIS. I'm going to give them back to you.

WILFRED. You can't do that now. You'll give the whole show away.

LOIS. There's nothing to give away.

WILFRED. Oh, isn't there? You don't know Gwen. She's got the tongue of a serpent.

LOIS. I can't accept a valuable pearl necklace from you.

WILFRED. At all events you must go on wearing it till we go away.

LOIS. How much did you pay for it?

WILFRED. My dear, it's not very good manners to ask what a present costs.

LOIS. Several hundred pounds?

WILFRED. I shouldn't wonder.

LOIS. D'you know, I've never had a valuable thing in my life. I shall be scared stiff of losing it.

WILFRED. Don't give it a thought. I'm not a very poor man, and if you do I shall survive it.

LOIS. But I might never have known. I might have worn it for years under the impression it was worth nothing.

WILFRED. That's what I hoped.

LOIS. [*With a smile.*] You know, that's rather sweet of you. I would never have thought you capable of that.

WILFRED. Why?

LOIS. Well, I've always looked upon you as rather a show-off. I should have thought you the sort of man who, when he gave a present that cost a lot of money, made pretty sure that you knew it.

WILFRED. That's not very flattering.

LOIS. You couldn't expect me to be so awfully grateful. I mean, a string of false pearls. Howard might have bought me that when he'd won a fiver on a horse.

WILFRED. I liked to think of you wearing pearls I'd given you. It gave me rather a thrill to think of them round your pretty neck.

LOIS. It seems a lot to pay for it.

WILFRED. You see, I'm so terribly in love with you. Give me a kiss, Lois. [*He puts his arm round her waist. He tries to kiss her lips, but she turns her face away, and he kisses her cheek.*] You do like me a little, don't you?

LOIS. [*Coolly.*] Yes.

WILFRED. D'you think you could ever love me?

LOIS. It wouldn't be much use, would it?

WILFRED. I'd do anything in the world for you. You know



Gwen and I don't get on. We'd be much happier apart. I know I could make you happy. After all you don't want to stay in this deadly little place all your life.

LOIS. What are you asking me to do now? Run away with you?

WILFRED. Why not?

LOIS. And be chucked the moment you were sick of me? Thank you.

WILFRED. I'll settle twenty thousand pounds on you to-morrow, and if you don't like to run away with me you needn't.

LOIS. Don't be such a donkey.

WILFRED. Gwen would divorce me if I made it worth her while and then we'd be married.

LOIS. I've always understood that when the gay seducer had worked his wicked will on the village maiden he screamed like a hyena at the thought of making an honest woman of her.

WILFRED. Oh, Lois, don't laugh at me. I love you with all my heart. Oh, I know I'm as old as the hills. I wish to God I was twenty years younger. I want you so awfully. I want you for keeps. *[Lois looks at him for a moment seriously.]*

LOIS. Let's go and play bridge.

*Ethel comes in.*

ETHEL. Sydney's getting impatient. *[To Wilfred, humorously.]* And Howard says, if you don't come along at once you'll have to marry the girl.

LOIS. I didn't know you were here.

ETHEL. We've only just come.

LOIS. Oh, well, if Howard's here you don't want me.

WILFRED. All right, we'll start a rubber. But come and cut in later, won't you.

LOIS. I must go and powder my nose. *[Wilfred goes out.]*

ETHEL. I hear Evie's been making a scene.

LOIS. Has she? What about?

ETHEL. Oh, I don't know. Nerves. She ought to get married.

LOIS. Who can she marry, poor dear?

ETHEL. Collie. They're just about the same age. I think it would be very suitable.

LOIS. Wilfred says he's going smash.

ETHEL. They could manage. Nobody's got any money nowadays, but one gets along somehow. Even a marriage that isn't quite satisfactory is better than not being married at all.

LOIS. Is that your experience?

ETHEL. I wasn't talking of myself. I haven't got anything to grumble at.

LOIS. Wilfred wants me to run away with him.

ETHEL. Wilfred? What do you mean? Why?

LOIS. He says he's in love with me.

ETHEL. The dirty old man. I don't understand. What does he suggest?

LOIS. Well, I suppose his idea is to keep me till he gets his divorce and then I suppose his idea is to marry me.

ETHEL. The beast.

LOIS. I'm getting on, you know. I'm twenty-six.

ETHEL. [*Aghast.*] Lois.

LOIS. What have I got to look forward to exactly? Getting jumpy like Eva or making the best of a bad job like you.

ETHEL. I have my children. Howard has his faults like everybody else. But he's fond of me. He looks up to me.

LOIS. My dear, you've got a wonderful character. I haven't. D'you think I haven't seen what a strain it is on you sometimes?

ETHEL. Of course it's a hard life. I ought to have known it would be when I married a tenant farmer.

LOIS. But you didn't expect he'd drink.

ETHEL. I don't suppose he drinks any more than most men of his class.

LOIS. Have you ever really quite got used to him?

ETHEL. [*Defiantly.*] I don't know what you mean?

LOIS. Well, he's common, isn't he?

ETHEL. [*Smiling.*] Are you quite sure that you and I are any great shakes?

LOIS. At all events we do talk the King's English. We have decent table manners and we wash.

ETHEL. I don't believe you'd wash much if you had to get up at six and milk the cows. All that's convention. One oughtn't to let oneself be upset by things like that.

LOIS. But aren't you?

ETHEL. Sometimes. I blame myself.

LOIS. What have you got in common with him really?

ETHEL. A recollection. That first year or two when I loved him so madly. He was gallant and young. He was manly. I loved him because he was of the soil and his strength had its roots in it. Nothing mattered then. Nothing that he did offended me.

LOIS. My dear, you're so romantic. I'm not. Romance doesn't last. When it's dead what is left but dust and ashes?

ETHEL. And the consciousness that you've done your best.

LOIS. Oh, that.

ETHEL. It's something. I've made my bed and I'm ready to lie on it. Have you ever heard me complain?

LOIS. Never.

ETHEL. I've carried my head high. I've tried to make Howard a good wife. I've tried to be a good mother to my children. Sometimes I'm inclined to be a little proud of myself.

LOIS. I suppose it's never occurred to you that it would have been better for Howard really if he'd married someone in his own class?

ETHEL. Oh yes, often. That's why I feel I must always have patience with him. I ought to have known. I oughtn't to have been carried away.

LOIS. My dear, you're so noble it makes me positively sick.

ETHEL. I'm not noble at all. I merely have a good deal of common sense. . . . Lois, you're not really thinking of going away with that man?

LOIS. No, not really. It's only that it's rather exciting to have the chance.

ETHEL. Oh, I'm so glad.

*Leonard Ardsley comes in.*

ARDSLEY. What are you two girls doing in here? Discussing frocks and frills, I'll be bound.

ETHEL. [*Kissing him.*] How are you, father?

ARDSLEY. Chatter, chatter, chatter all day long. I know you. It's a marvel to me that you never get tired of talking about clothes. Collie's here, isn't he?

LOIS. Yes, he's playing bridge.

ARDSLEY. Well, run along both of you and send him in here. I want to see him.

LOIS. All right.

ARDSLEY. Kiddies well?

ETHEL. Oh yes. They always are.

ARDSLEY. Fine thing for them living on a farm like that. Grand thing a country life.

ETHEL. They've gone back to school now.



ARDSLEY. Of course. I remember. Best thing in the world for them. Happiest time in their lives. [*The two girls go out. Ardsley catches sight of a ladies' paper and takes it up.*] I knew it. [*He gives a complacent smile at his own perspicacity. The door opens and Collie comes in. Ardsley at the sight of him assumes his professional air.*] How d' you do?

COLLIE. You weren't in when I turned up at the office just now.

ARDSLEY. No. I've got someone waiting that I thought you'd better not meet, and I wanted to see you before I saw him. So I came through my private door.

COLLIE. I'm just as glad. I'm not used to solicitors' offices and I'm always rather intimidated.

ARDSLEY. I'm afraid I've got something very serious to say to you.

COLLIE. Oh, Lord.

ARDSLEY. In the three years you've been here we've seen a good deal of you. We all liked you.

COLLIE. It's been a snip for me having this house to come to. Except for all of you I should have had a pretty thin time.

ARDSLEY. I'm sure you'll realize that it's not very pleasant for me to find myself in my present position.

COLLIE. I suppose that means the game's up. I've made a damned good fight for it. Have I got to file my petition?

ARDSLEY. The bank wrote to you last month telling you that you were overdrawn and that they wouldn't cash any further cheques you drew until your account was put in order.

COLLIE. Yes.

ARDSLEY. And after that you gave several post-dated cheques in payment of various accounts.

COLLIE. I was being pestered for money all over the shop. I couldn't help myself.

ARDSLEY. You were hopelessly insolvent. How did you expect to meet them?

COLLIE. I thought something would turn up.

ARDSLEY. Don't you know that's a criminal offence?

COLLIE. Oh, what rot. It's the sort of thing any one might do when he was up against it.

ARDSLEY. Not without going to gaol.

COLLIE. Good God, you don't mean to say they're going to prosecute?

ARDSLEY. You can't expect the injured parties to take it lying down.

COLLIE. But it's absurd. They know I didn't mean any harm.

ARDSLEY. It's almost incredible that you should be so un-businesslike.

COLLIE. What should I know about business? I'm a sailor. I was in the navy for twenty years.

ARDSLEY. I'm afraid you've been very unwise.

COLLIE. Then what's going to happen?

ARDSLEY. The bank-manager is in my office now. You must be prepared for the worst, Collie. A warrant will be applied for.

COLLIE. Does that mean I shall be arrested?

ARDSLEY. Of course you'll be released on bail. I'll arrange that. If you elect to be tried by a jury the justices will refer the case to quarter sessions. It's early days yet to decide, we'll see what counsel has to say. My own opinion at the moment is that the best thing you can do is to plead guilty and throw yourself on the mercy of the court.

COLLIE. But I'm not guilty.

ARDSLEY. Don't be such a fool. You're just as guilty as the thief who sneaks ten bob from your till when no one is looking.

COLLIE. What will they do to me?

ARDSLEY. In consideration of your previous good character and your record in the navy, I have little doubt that the judge will be lenient. I should be very disappointed if you got more than from three to six months in the second division.

COLLIE. [*With a flash of anger at the casual way he takes it.*] You don't care, do you?

ARDSLEY. My dear boy, don't think I'm happy about it. In my profession one often finds oneself in very disagreeable situations, but I don't remember ever having found myself in a more painful one than this.

COLLIE. Fortunately most people get over seeing the other fellow come a cropper.

ARDSLEY. It's not only the pleasant social relations we've always had with you, but that you should have got the D.S.O. and been in command of a destroyer—it all makes your fall so much more distressing. I'm afraid it makes it also much more disgraceful.

COLLIE. They'll take my D.S.O. away from me.

ARDSLEY. I suppose so.

COLLIE. I suppose it doesn't occur to you that when a fellow has served the country for twenty years in a job that's unfitted him for anything else, it's rather distressing and rather disgraceful that he should be shoved out into the world with

no means of earning his living and nothing between him and starvation but a bonus of a thousand pounds or so?

ARDSLEY. I can't go into that. Though of course it's a good point to take up at the trial. I'll make a note of that. Of course the answer is that the country was up against it and had to economize and if a certain number of individuals had to suffer it can't be helped.

COLLIE. When I was torpedoed during the war and they fished me out, God, what a bit of luck I said. I never knew.

ARDSLEY. Do me the justice to admit that I begged you six months ago to file your petition. You wouldn't take my advice.

COLLIE. I'd had it drummed into me for so many years that nothing is impossible in the British Navy. It was hard to give in while I still had some fight in me.

ARDSLEY. You mustn't despair.

COLLIE. There's not much of a future for an ex-naval officer, forty years of age, after six months in gaol.

ARDSLEY. I've been a hunting man. It's a very good plan not to take your fences before you come to them. Now look here, I must be off. There's whisky and soda on the side-board. You help yourself to a drink. I'm sure you want it.

COLLIE. Thank you.

ARDSLEY. [*Giving him his hand.*] Good-bye, my boy. I'll let you know about things as soon as I hear.

COLLIE. Good-bye.

*[Ardsley goes out. Collie, sinking into a chair, buries his face in his hands; but hearing the door open he looks up and pulls himself together. Eva comes in.]*

EVA. Oh, I beg your pardon. I was looking for my bag. I didn't know any one was here.

COLLIE. I was just going.

EVA. Please don't. I won't disturb you.

COLLIE. What are you talking about? Surely you can come into your own dining-room.

EVA. I wasn't speaking the truth. I knew you were here and my bag's upstairs. I heard father go. I wanted to see you. I'm so frightfully anxious.

COLLIE. What about?

EVA. Every one knows you're in difficulties. Father let fall a hint at luncheon. I knew he was seeing you this afternoon.

COLLIE. It's kind of you to bother, Evie. I've had rather a rough passage, but at all events I know where I am now.



EVA. Can nothing be done?

COLLIE. Not very much, I 'm afraid.

EVA. Won't you let me help you?

COLLIE. [*With a smile.*] My dear, how can you?

EVA. It 's only a matter of money, isn't it?

COLLIE. Only is good.

EVA. I 've got a thousand pounds that my godmother left me. It 's invested and I 've always dressed myself on the interest. I could let you have that.

COLLIE. I couldn't possibly take money from you. It 's out of the question.

EVA. Why? If I want to give it you.

COLLIE. It 's awfully generous of you, but . . .

EVA. [*Interrupting.*] You must know how frightfully fond I am of you.

COLLIE. It 's very nice of you, Evie. Besides, your father would never hear of it.

EVA. It 's my own money. I 'm not a child.

COLLIE. Can't be done, my dear.

EVA. Why shouldn't I buy an interest in your garage? I mean, then it would be just an investment.

COLLIE. Can you see your father's face when you suggested it? It looked all right when I bought it. Things were booming then. But the slump has killed it. It isn't worth a bob.

EVA. But surely if you can get more capital you can afford to wait till times get better?

COLLIE. Your father doesn't think much of me as it is. He 'd think me a pretty mean skunk if he thought I 'd induced you to put your money into an insolvent business.

EVA. You keep on talking of father. It 's nothing to do with him. It 's you and I that are concerned.

COLLIE. I know you 're a damned good sort and you 're always going out of your way to do things for people, but there are limits. Perhaps you 'll want to get married one of these days and then you 'll find your thousand pounds devilish useful.

EVA. I shall never have a better use for it than to give it to someone who means so much to me as you do.

COLLIE. I 'm awfully sorry, God knows I want the money, but I really can't take it from any one like you.

EVA. I thought you liked me.

COLLIE. I like you very much. You 're a jolly good friend.

EVA. I thought perhaps some day we might be more than

friends. [*There is a moment's silence. She is very nervous, but forces herself to go on.*] After all, if we were engaged, it would be very natural that I should come to the rescue when you were in a hole.

COLLIE. But we're not engaged.

EVA. Why shouldn't we pretend to be? Just for a little while, I mean. Then I could lend you the money and father would help you to get straight.

COLLIE. Oh, my dear, that's absurd. That's the sort of thing they do in novels. You mustn't be so romantic.

EVA. You could always break it off when you got straight.

COLLIE. That's not a very pretty rôle you're asking me to play.

EVA. [*In a husky voice.*] Perhaps when you got used to the idea you wouldn't want to break it off.

COLLIE. My dear, what on earth ever put such an idea in your head?

EVA. You're alone and I'm alone. There's no one in the world that cares twopence for either of us.

COLLIE. Oh, what nonsense. Your family's devoted to you. They depend on you so enormously. Why, the whole house centres round you.

EVA. I want to get away. I'm so unhappy here.

COLLIE. I can't believe that. You're just nervous and run down. I dare say you want a bit of change.

EVA. You won't understand. How can you be so cruel?

COLLIE. I'm not cruel. I'm awfully grateful to you.

EVA. I can't say any more than I have. It's so humiliating.

COLLIE. I'm dreadfully sorry. I don't want to hurt your feelings.

EVA. After all, I'm not so old as all that. Plenty of men have wanted to marry me.

COLLIE. I don't doubt that for a minute. I'm quite convinced that one of these days you'll find someone that you really like and I'm sure you'll make him a perfectly grand wife. [*She begins to cry and he looks at her with troubled eyes.*] I'm sorry.

[*She does not answer and quietly he leaves the room. She sobs. But she hears the door open and starts to her feet, turning her face away so that her tears should not be seen. The new-comer is Howard. He is quite sober.*]

HOWARD. Where's Collie?

EVA. How should I know?

HOWARD. We want him for bridge.

EVA. Well, you can see he isn't here, can't you?

HOWARD. He was here.

EVA. [*Stamping her foot.*] Well, he isn't here now.

HOWARD. Temper, temper. What price the angel of mercy now?

EVA. You're very funny, aren't you? Terribly amusing.

HOWARD. I know what you've been doing. You've been asking him to marry you.

EVA. [*Furiously.*] You drunken brute. Damn you. Blast you.

[*She flings out of the room. Howard purses his lips and grins. Then he goes over to the sideboard and helps himself to a whisky and soda. While he is sipping it Lois comes in.*]

LOIS. Hulloo, I thought you were playing bridge.

HOWARD. No. Your father wanted to see Collie, and Sydney and Wilfred are having a game of piquet.

LOIS. So you seized the opportunity to have a drink on the quiet.

HOWARD. My dear girl, I had to have something to pull myself together. Evie's been swearing at me. Such language, my dear. Called me a drunken brute. I mean, it shakes a chap's morale when a properly brought-up young lady forgets herself like that.

LOIS. Are you obliged to drink?

HOWARD. Well, in a manner of speaking I am. My poor old father died of drink and his poor old father died of drink. So it's in the family. See?

LOIS. It is rotten for Ethel.

HOWARD. She has a lot to put up with, poor girl. You don't have to tell me. I know it. Fact is, she's too good for me.

LOIS. Much.

HOWARD. That's what I say. She's a lady. I mean you only have to look at her to know that. And mind you, she never lets up. I can be a gentleman when I want to, but I don't want to all the time. I mean to say, I like to have a good old laugh now and again. She never does. Truth is, between you and me, she has no sense of humour.

LOIS. I dare say after being married to you for fifteen years it's worn rather thin.

HOWARD. I like a girl as has a bit of fun in her. Let's have a good time while we're alive, I say; we can do all the sitting quiet we want when we're dead and buried.

LOIS. There's something in that.

HOWARD. Mind you, I'm not complaining of Ethel. Too much of a gentleman to do that. She's class. I know that. And



I'm only a common farmer. Only, you know what I mean, you don't always want to be looking up to your wife, do you?  
LOIS. No one asked you to marry Ethel.

HOWARD. Pity you wasn't old enough then. I'd have married you instead.

LOIS. Complimentary, aren't you?

HOWARD. You're not half the lady what Ethel is. And you're a bit of a devil, I shouldn't wonder. You and me'd get on like a house on fire.

LOIS. You're drunk.

HOWARD. No, I'm not. I'm cold stone sober.

LOIS. Then I like you better drunk.

HOWARD. Give me a kiss, honey.

LOIS. D'you want your face slapped?

HOWARD. I don't mind.

LOIS. The nerve of it.

HOWARD. Come on. Be a sport.

LOIS. Go to hell.

HOWARD. I would with you.

*[With a sudden movement he catches hold of her and gives her a kiss full on the lips. She tears herself away from him.]*

LOIS. How dare you?

HOWARD. Oh, come off it. You didn't mind. You liked it.

LOIS. It almost made me sick. You stink of cows.

HOWARD. A lot of girls like that. Makes them go all funny.

LOIS. You filthy beast.

HOWARD. Want another?

LOIS. If it weren't for Ethel I'd go straight to father.

HOWARD. Don't make me laugh. D'you think I don't know about girls? And if you don't know about men it's high time you did. A good-looking girl like you. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I mean, think what you're missing.

LOIS. You've got a pretty good opinion of yourself, haven't you?

HOWARD. And not without cause. Of course I don't say it's like the war. God, I wish it had gone on for ever. Those were the days. If you liked the look of a girl you just walked her up the garden path. Of course the uniform had a lot to do with it, and being a blasted hero.

LOIS. Brute.

HOWARD. *[Confidentially.]* Look here, why don't you come up to the farm for a few days? We could have a grand old time.

LOIS. I don't know what you take me for, Howard.

HOWARD. Don't talk that sort of rot to me. You're human, same as I am, aren't you? What's the good of mouldering away without having a bit of fun in your life? You come up to the farm. Now the kids have gone to boarding-school their room's empty.

LOIS. If you're not drunk you're crazy.

HOWARD. No, I'm not. You'll come, my girl.

LOIS. [*Contemptuously.*] And what makes you think that?

HOWARD. I'll tell you. Because I want you and you know I want you and there isn't a thing that takes a girl like that. By God, I want you.

*[He looks at her and the violence of his desire seems heavy in the room. Lois instinctively puts her hand to her breast. Her breathing is oppressed. There is a silence. Mrs Ardsley comes in.]*

LOIS. [*Recovering herself.*] Oh, mother.

HOWARD. I've just been telling this young woman she ought to come up to the farm for a few days. She looks to me as if she wanted a change.

MRS ARDSLEY. I'm glad you agree with me. Only a little while ago I was suggesting that she should go and stay with Aunt Emily for two or three weeks.

LOIS. I've been thinking it over, mother. I dare say you're quite right. When d'you think I'd better go?

MRS ARDSLEY. The sooner the better. To-morrow.

LOIS. All right. I'll send the old girl a wire and tell her I'm coming.

MRS ARDSLEY. You needn't do that. I've just written to her to say that you'll arrive in time for dinner.

LOIS. Have you? You domineering old lady.

MRS ARDSLEY. You're a very good girl, Lois. I didn't think you'd disregard my wishes.

LOIS. I don't think I'm a very good girl. But you're a darling old mother.

*[She kisses her tenderly. Mrs Ardsley, smiling, pats her hand.]*

CURTAIN

### ACT III

*The drawing-room at the Ardsleys' house. It is a large low room, with french windows leading on to the terrace that was the scene of the first act. It is furnished in an old-fashioned, commonplace and comfortable way. Nothing much has been added since it was all new when the Ardsleys married. The walls are overcrowded with framed engravings and water-colours, copies of Florentine bas-reliefs, weapons on wooden shields and plates in old English china. The occasional tables are laden with knick-knacks. The arm-chairs and sofas are covered with loose-covers of faded cretonne. It is a rainy, windy day, and there is a fire burning on the hearth. The light is falling. It is about half-past four. Wilfred is standing at the fire warming his hands. Lois comes in. She is wearing a coat and skirt.*

LOIS. [*Coming towards him with outstretched hand.*] How d' you do? Mother's out. She'll be back to tea. She's gone to Stanbury.

WILFRED. I know. I asked the maid if I could see you. Is it true you're going away to-day?

LOIS. Yes, I'm spending a fortnight with an aunt near Canterbury.

WILFRED. But in a fortnight I shall be gone.

LOIS. Will you?

WILFRED. Were you going without saying good-bye to me?

LOIS. I thought mother would say it for me.

WILFRED. [*In a husky, agitated tone.*] Don't go, Lois.

LOIS. [*Indifferently.*] Why not?

WILFRED. Why are you going?

LOIS. Mother thought I wanted a change. I generally spend a fortnight with Aunt Emily once or twice a year. She's my godmother and she says she's going to leave me something in her will.

WILFRED. I was going up to London to-morrow to settle that money on you.

LOIS. Don't be so silly. As if I wanted that. If I ran away with you I wouldn't take it. I'd rather have my independence.



WILFRED. You might have given me the last fortnight. It means nothing to you. And so much to me.

LOIS. How did you know I was going?

WILFRED. Gwen told me.

LOIS. How did she know?

WILFRED. Your mother rang up.

LOIS. Oh!

WILFRED. Are you quite sure it was about the sale of work that Gwen came to see your mother yesterday?

LOIS. She wouldn't have dared. You don't know mother. She'd never let any one say a word against any of us. You've only seen her when she's being nice. She can be as stiff as a poker if one tries to take a liberty with her.

WILFRED. Gwen spotted the pearls all right.

LOIS. [*Beginning to unclasp them.*] Oh, I forgot. I can give them back to you now.

WILFRED. Won't you keep them? Please. It can't hurt you and it'll give me so much pleasure.

LOIS. I don't see how. The chances are that we shall never see one another again. As far as you're concerned it's just throwing money away.

WILFRED. I want to be able to think that you're wearing something I gave you. I've held them in my hands. I want to think that they have the warmth of your body and they touch the softness of your neck.

LOIS. [*Tempted.*] I've never had anything so valuable. I suppose I'm half a strumpet.

WILFRED. They only cost a pound, Lois.

LOIS. Oh, you liar. Does Gwen know you gave them to me?

WILFRED. She hasn't said so. She knows there's no one else who could.

LOIS. Has she been making a scene?

WILFRED. Oh, no, she's been holding herself in. She's afraid.

LOIS. Why? Are you so terrifying?

WILFRED. I don't think you'd find me so.

LOIS. Are you awfully in love with me?

WILFRED. Awfully.

LOIS. Strange, isn't it? I wonder why.

WILFRED. I'm broken-hearted, Lois. I know you don't love me. There's no reason why you should. But you might. If I were very kind to you. And patient. I'd do anything in the world to make you happy.

LOIS. It's curious, it does give one rather a funny feeling to know someone's in love with you.

WILFRED. When Gwen told me you were going, the whole world went black. She tried to say it casually, but she knew she was thrusting a dagger in my heart and she watched my face to see me writhe.

LOIS. Poor Gwen. I suppose people can be rather foul when they're jealous.

WILFRED. Oh, damn Gwen. I can only think of myself. You're everything in the world to me, and every one else can go to hell. It's my last chance, Lois.

*[She slowly shakes her head. He looks at her for a moment with despair.]*

WILFRED. Is there nothing I can say to persuade you?

LOIS. Nothing.

WILFRED. I'm done. I'm finished.

LOIS. I don't think so. You'll get over it. When are you going to the Riviera?

WILFRED. It's only a joke to you. *[Violently.]* Oh, I hate being old.

*Eva comes in.*

EVA. Why haven't the curtains been drawn? Oh, Wilfred!

WILFRED. *[Trying to seem naturally casual.]* How are you to-day?

EVA. I'll turn on the lights.

*[She switches on the electricity while Lois draws the curtains.]*

LOIS. It is a foul day.

WILFRED. I'll be getting along.

EVA. Oh, aren't you going to stay to tea? Sydney's just coming. He'd love to play piquet with you.

WILFRED. I'm sorry, I must be off. I only came to say good-bye to Lois.

EVA. We shall be seeing you again soon, I suppose?

WILFRED. I expect so.

*[They shake hands. Lois gives him her hand.]*

LOIS. Good-bye. Give my love to Gwen.

WILFRED. Good-bye. *[He goes out quickly.]*

EVA. What's the matter with him? He seems all funny to-day.

LOIS. I didn't notice that he was any different.

EVA. Are you all packed up and everything?

LOIS. Yes.

EVA. Are you taking the five-fifty?

LOIS. Yes.

EVA. That gives you nice time to have tea. Ethel's coming in.

LOIS. I know. She wants me to take some partridges to Aunt Emily.

*Sydney comes in.*

SYDNEY. Tea ready?

EVA. It's not five yet.

SYDNEY. Thank God for the fire. I hate that gas-stove in my room. Mother's not back yet, I suppose?

EVA. No. She said she'd be in to tea.

LOIS. Howard says he's expecting a very hard winter.

SYDNEY. Cheerful.

LOIS. Oh, I hate the winter.

EVA. If it weren't for the winter we shouldn't enjoy the spring.

SYDNEY. Are you obliged to say things like that, Evie?

EVA. It happens to be true.

SYDNEY. It happens to be true that two and two are four, but one needn't make a song and dance about it.

LOIS. I'll put on a record, shall I?

EVA. Oh, for goodness' sake don't, it drives me mad.

LOIS. Oh, all right. *[They both give her a little look of surprise.]*

EVA. I'm rather jumpy to-day. I suppose it's the east wind.

SYDNEY. Give me my tatting, Lois, will you?

LOIS. I will.

*[She gives it to him and while he talks he proceeds mechanically with his work.]*

SYDNEY. I wonder if Collie will turn up?

EVA. I rang up to ask him to come in to tea. He hasn't been at the garage all day.

*Ethel and Howard come in.*

ETHEL. How's everybody?

SYDNEY. Hulloo.

HOWARD. We've brought the partridges. They'd better be hung for a couple of days. They were only shot yesterday.

SYDNEY. Got many birds this year, Howard?

HOWARD. A few. What's that you're doing?

SYDNEY. Tatting.

EVA. Put on the gramophone if you want to.

HOWARD. I'll put it on.

*[He goes over, gives the machine a wind and starts a record.]*



ETHEL. I'm afraid it won't be very amusing for you at Aunt Emily's.

LOIS. I shall read a lot.

SYDNEY. Let's hope she'll die soon and leave you a packet.

LOIS. She's got very little to leave.

*[Suddenly Mr Ardsley bursts into the room.]*

ETHEL. Oh, father.

ARDSLEY. Turn off the gramophone.

EVA. What's the matter?

*[Howard who is still at the gramophone stops the record.]*

ARDSLEY. Something dreadful's happened. I thought I'd better come in and tell you at once.

EVA. *[With a cry.]* Collie.

ARDSLEY. How d'you know?

SYDNEY. What is it, father?

ARDSLEY. They've just telephoned to me from the police station. There's been an accident. Collie's been shot.

HOWARD. Shot? Who by?

ARDSLEY. I'm afraid he shot himself.

HOWARD. Good God!

EVA. He isn't dead?

ARDSLEY. Yes.

*[Eva gives a loud, long shriek. It is a sound that is only just human.]*

ETHEL. Evie!

*[Eva goes up to her father with arms raised high in the air and clenched hands.]*

EVA. You killed him, you fiend.

ARDSLEY. I? What are you talking about?

EVA. You fiend! You beast!

ETHEL. *[Putting a restraining hand on her.]* Evie!

EVA. *[Shaking her off angrily.]* Leave me alone. *[To Ardsley.]* You could have saved him. You devil! I hate you! I hate you!

ARDSLEY. Are you mad, Eva?

EVA. You hounded him to his death. You never gave him a chance.

ARDSLEY. Good heavens, we all gave him chance after chance.

EVA. It's a lie. He begged for money. He begged for time. And not one of you would help him. Not one of you remembered that he'd risked his life for you a hundred times. You brutes.

ARDSLEY. Oh, what rubbish.

EVA. I hope you're shamed before the whole world. Let every one know that a brave and gallant gentleman went to his death because there wasn't a soul in this bloody place who would lend him two hundred pounds.

ARDSLEY. Pretty language, Eva. In point of fact two hundred pounds wouldn't have helped him. It would have saved him from going to gaol, but that's all.

EVA. Gaol?

ARDSLEY. Yes, a warrant for his arrest was issued this morning.

EVA. [*With anguish.*] Poor Collie. I can't bear it. Cruel. Cruel.

[*She begins to sob desperately.*]

ARDSLEY. Now, my dear, don't take it so much to heart. Go and lie down in your room. Ethel will come and bathe your forehead with eau-de-Cologne. Of course the whole thing is very unfortunate. No one regrets it more than I do. The poor fellow was in a hopeless mess and perhaps he took the best way out of a situation that could only have thrown discredit on the uniform he'd worn.

[*While he says this Eva raises her head and looks at him with eyes of horror.*]

EVA. But he was alive and he's dead. He's gone from us for ever. He's been robbed of all the years that were before him. Haven't you any pity for him? He used to come here almost every day.

ARDSLEY. He was a very nice fellow and a gentleman. Unfortunately he wasn't a very good business man.

EVA. As if I cared if he was a good business man.

ARDSLEY. There's no reason why you should. But his creditors did.

EVA. He was everything in the world to me.

ARDSLEY. My dear, what an exaggerated way to speak. You ought to have more sense at your age.

EVA. He loved me and I loved him.

ARDSLEY. Don't talk such nonsense.

EVA. We were engaged to be married.

ARDSLEY. [*With astonishment.*] What's that? Since when?

EVA. Since ages.

ARDSLEY. Well, my dear, you're out of that. He was in no position to marry.

EVA. [*With anguish.*] It was my only chance.

ARDSLEY. You have a good home. You'd much better stay here.

EVA. And make myself useful?

ARDSLEY. There's no harm in that.

EVA. I've got just as much right to life and happiness as any one else.

ARDSLEY. Of course you have.

EVA. You've done everything you could to prevent me from marrying.

ARDSLEY. Rubbish.

EVA. Why should I be sacrificed all the time? Why should I be at everybody's beck and call? Why should I have to do everything? I'm sick of being put upon. I'm sick of you, I'm sick of Sydney, I'm sick of Lois. I'm sick of you all.

*[During the speech her agitation has become quite uncontrolled. There is a table covered with ornaments by her, and now with a violent gesture she throws it over so that everything is scattered on the floor.]*

ETHEL. Evie.

EVA. Damn you. Damn you. Damn you.

*[Shrieking she throws herself down and hysterically beats upon the floor with her fists.]*

ARDSLEY. Stop it. Stop it.

HOWARD. Better get her out of here.

*[He picks her up and carries her out of the room. Ardsley opens the door. He and Ethel follow her out. Lois and Sydney are left alone. Lois, pale and trembling, has watched the scene with terror.]*

LOIS. What's the matter with her?

SYDNEY. Hysterics. Upset you?

LOIS. I'm frightened.

SYDNEY. I'll telephone for Uncle Charlie. I think she wants a doctor.

*[He makes his way out of the room. Lois stands stock still. She cannot control the nervous trembling that seizes her. Howard comes in.]*

HOWARD. I've put her on the dining-room sofa.

LOIS. Are Ethel and father with her?

HOWARD. Yes. *[He looks at her and sees the condition she is in. He puts his arm round her shoulders.]* Poor old girl, gave you quite a turn, didn't it?

LOIS. *[Unconscious of his touch.]* I'm frightened.

HOWARD. It's not serious, you know. Do her good to let off steam like that. You mustn't take it to heart.

*[He bends down and kisses her on the cheek.]*



LOIS. Why do you do that?

HOWARD. I don't like to see you miserable.

*[She turns round a little and gives him a thoughtful look. He smiles rather charmingly.]*

HOWARD. I'm quite sober.

LOIS. You'd better take your arm away. Ethel can come in any minute.

HOWARD. I'm terribly fond of you, Lois. Don't you like me?

LOIS. *[Miserably.]* Not much.

HOWARD. Shall I come over and see you when you're staying at Aunt Emily's?

LOIS. Why should you?

HOWARD. *[In a low passionate whisper.]* Lois.

*[She looks at him curiously and with a cold hostility.]*

LOIS. Isn't human nature funny? I know with my mind that you're a rotter. And I despise you. Isn't it lucky you can't see into my heart?

HOWARD. Why, what should I see there?

LOIS. Desire.

HOWARD. What for? I don't know what you mean.

LOIS. I didn't think you would or I shouldn't have told you. How shameful and ugly. I see that all right. It's funny, it doesn't seem to make any difference.

HOWARD. Oh, I see what you mean now. That's quite O.K. Give it time, girlie. I'll wait.

LOIS. *[Coolly, indifferently.]* You swine.

*Sydney comes in.*

SYDNEY. Uncle Charlie's on his way round now.

LOIS. Mother will be back in a minute.

SYDNEY. How are you going to get to the station?

HOWARD. I'll drive you if you like.

LOIS. Oh, it's all arranged.

*Ardsley comes in.*

ARDSLEY. Prentice has come. They're putting Evie to bed.

LOIS. I'll go and see if I can do anything. *[She goes out.]*

ARDSLEY. *[To Sydney.]* Sydney, did you know anything about her being engaged to Collie?

SYDNEY. I don't believe she was.

ARDSLEY. D'you mean to say you think it was pure invention?

SYDNEY. I shouldn't wonder. But I think she'll stick to it. After all no one can now prove she wasn't.

ARDSLEY. It's a terrible thing about poor Collie. No one can be more distressed than I.

SYDNEY. It seems a bit hard that after going through the war and getting a D.S.O., he should have come to this end.

ARDSLEY. He may have been a very good naval officer. He was a very poor business man. That's all there is to it.

SYDNEY. We might put that on his tombstone. It would make a damned good epitaph.

ARDSLEY. If that's a joke, Sydney, I must say I think it in very bad taste.

SYDNEY. [*With bitter calm.*] You see, I feel I have a certain right to speak. I know how dead keen we all were when the war started. Every sacrifice was worth it. We didn't say much about it because we were rather shy, but honour did mean something to us and patriotism wasn't just a word. And then, when it was all over, we did think that those of us who'd died hadn't died in vain, and those of us who were broken and shattered and knew they wouldn't be any more good in the world were buoyed up by the thought that if they'd given everything they'd given it in a great cause.

ARDSLEY. And they had.

SYDNEY. Do you still think that? I don't. I know that we were the dupes of the incompetent fools who ruled the nations. I know that we were sacrificed to their vanity, their greed, and their stupidity. And the worst of it is that as far as I can tell they haven't learnt a thing. They're just as vain, they're just as greedy, they're just as stupid as they ever were. They muddle on, muddle on, and one of these days they'll muddle us all into another war. When that happens I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going out into the streets and cry: 'Look at me, don't be a lot of damned fools; it's all bunk what they're saying to you, about honour and patriotism and glory. Bunk, bunk, bunk.'

HOWARD. Who cares if it is bunk? I had the time of my life in the war. No responsibility and plenty of money. More than I'd ever had before or ever since. All the girls you wanted and all the whisky. Excitement. A roughish time in the trenches, but a grand lark afterwards. I tell you it was a bitter day for me when they signed the armistice. What have I got now? Just the same old thing day after day, working my guts out to keep body and soul together. The

very day war is declared I join up and the sooner the better, if you ask me. That 's the life for me. By God!

ARDSLEY. [*To his son.*] You 've had a lot to put up with, Sydney. I know that. But don't think you 're the only one. It 's been a great blow to me that you haven't been able to follow me in my business as I followed my father. Three generations, that would have been. But it wasn't to be. No one wants another war less that I do, but if it comes I 'm convinced that you 'll do your duty, so far as in you lies, as you did it before. It was a great grief to me that when the call came I was too old to answer. But I did what I could. I was enrolled as a special constable. And if I 'm wanted again I shall be ready again.

SYDNEY. [*Between his teeth.*] God give me patience.

HOWARD. You have a whisky and soda, old boy, and you 'll feel better.

SYDNEY. Will a whisky and soda make me forget poor Evie half crazy, Collie doing away with himself rather than go to gaol, and my lost sight?

ARDSLEY. But, my dear boy, that 's just our immediate circle. Of course we suffered, perhaps we 've had more than our fair share, but we 're not every one.

SYDNEY. Don't you know that all over England there are families like ours, all over Germany, and all over France? We were quite content to go our peaceful way, jogging along obscurely, and happy enough. All we asked was to be left alone. Oh, it 's no good talking.

ARDSLEY. The fact is, Sydney, you think too much.

SYDNEY. [*Smiling.*] I dare say you 're right, father. You see, I have little else to do. I 'm thinking of collecting stamps.

ARDSLEY. That 's a very good idea, my boy. If you go about it cleverly there 's no reason why it shouldn't be a very sound investment.

[*Mrs Ardsley comes in. She is still wearing her hat and coat.*]

SYDNEY. Hulloo, mother.

[*As she sits down, a trifle wearily, her eye catches the litter on the floor of all the things Eva threw over when she upset the table.*]

MRS ARDSLEY. Been having a picnic?

ARDSLEY. Evie upset the table.

MRS ARDSLEY. In play or anger?

HOWARD. I 'd better pick the things up.



MRS ARDSLEY. It does look rather untidy.

[*He picks up one piece after the other and sets the table straight.*]

ARDSLEY. Poor Collie's killed himself.

MRS ARDSLEY. Yes, I've heard. I'm sorry.

ARDSLEY. Evie's in rather a state about it.

MRS ARDSLEY. Poor thing, I'll go to her.

ARDSLEY. Charlie Prentice is with her.

SYDNEY. Why don't you wait till you've had a cup of tea, mother? You sound tired.

MRS ARDSLEY. I am rather. [*Dr Prentice comes in and she gives him a smile.*] Oh, Charlie. I was just coming upstairs.

PRENTICE. I wouldn't. I've given Evie a hypodermic. I'd rather she were left alone.

ARDSLEY. Take a pew, Charlie. I'm going back to my office. One or two things I want to finish up. I'll be along for tea in a quarter of an hour.

MRS ARDSLEY. Very well. [*He goes out.*]

HOWARD. [*Having finished.*] There. That's all right, I think.

MRS ARDSLEY. Thank you.

HOWARD. I say, I think I'll just go along to Collie's garage. There are one or two bits and pieces that I've got my eye on. I'd just as soon make sure that nobody sneaks them.

SYDNEY. Oh, yeah.

HOWARD. Tell Ethel I'll come back for her. I shan't be long. [*He goes out.*]

SYDNEY. What did the specialist say, mother?

MRS ARDSLEY. What specialist, Sydney?

SYDNEY. Come off it, darling. You don't generally favour your family with a very detailed account of your movements. When you took such pains to tell us exactly why you were going into Stanbury this afternoon, I guessed that you were going to see a specialist.

MRS ARDSLEY. I never believe a word doctors say to me.

PRENTICE. Don't mind me.

MRS ARDSLEY. Tell me about Evie.

PRENTICE. I hardly know yet. It may be it would be better if she went into a home for a few weeks.

MRS ARDSLEY. She isn't mad?

PRENTICE. She's very unbalanced. . . . I was just coming round when Sydney telephoned. Murray rang me up after he'd seen you.

MRS ARDSLEY. Why didn't he mind his own business?

PRENTICE. It was his business.

SYDNEY. Would you like me to leave you?

*[Mrs Ardsley gives him a little, thoughtful look.]*

MRS ARDSLEY. No, stay if you like. But go on with your tatting and pretend you don't hear.

SYDNEY. All right.

*[He takes his work and goes on as though absorbed in it.]*

MRS ARDSLEY. Don't interrupt.

PRENTICE. I'm afraid Murray could only confirm my diagnosis, Charlotte.

MRS ARDSLEY. *[Cheerfully.]* I had an idea he would, you know. You stick together, you doctors.

PRENTICE. He agrees with me that an immediate operation is necessary.

MRS ARDSLEY. I believe he does.

PRENTICE. When I spoke to him on the telephone he said you were—hesitating a little.

MRS ARDSLEY. Not at all. I didn't hesitate for a minute.

PRENTICE. I'm delighted to hear it. I know your courage. I was confident in your good sense.

MRS ARDSLEY. I'm glad.

PRENTICE. I'll make all the arrangements and we'll have it done as soon as possible.

MRS ARDSLEY. I'm not going to be operated on, Charlie.

PRENTICE. My dear, I must be frank with you. It's the only chance we have of saving your life.

MRS ARDSLEY. That's not true, Charlie. It's the only chance you have of prolonging my life. For a few months or a year perhaps. And then it'll start all over again. Do you think it's worth it? I don't.

PRENTICE. You have your husband and your children to think of.

MRS ARDSLEY. I know. It would be a frightful expense. If I got over the operation I should always be an invalid. I should have to have a nurse. I should be much more bother than I was worth.

PRENTICE. That's unkind, Charlotte. And it's untrue.

MRS ARDSLEY. You've known me a great many years, Charlie. Haven't you noticed that when once I make up my mind I don't change it?

PRENTICE. Don't be a damned fool, Charlotte.

MRS ARDSLEY. I have nothing to complain of. I haven't had an unhappy life. I'm prepared to call it a day.

PRENTICE. I don't know if Murray made himself quite clear.

MRS ARDSLEY. I asked him to.

PRENTICE. Listen to me. I mean every word I say. If you won't consent to an operation I'm afraid you have only a few months to live.

MRS ARDSLEY. [*Coolly.*] How odd! Those were his very words.

PRENTICE. Well?

MRS ARDSLEY. I've often wondered in the past how I should take it when I was told that I was going to die. I've wondered if I'd scream or faint. You know, I didn't do either. It gave me a funny sort of thrill. I felt as if I'd drunk a glass of port on an empty stomach. I had some shopping to do at Stanbury afterwards. I'm afraid I was rather extravagant. I felt so gay and light-hearted.

PRENTICE. That's more than I do.

MRS ARDSLEY. It shows how right Leonard is when he says it's silly to take your jumps before you come to them.

PRENTICE. Oh, damn Leonard!

MRS ARDSLEY. I'm free. Nothing matters very much any more. It's a very comfortable feeling.

PRENTICE. And the rest?

MRS ARDSLEY. Oh, the rest, my dear, is between me and the pale, distant shadow that is all you clever people have left me of God.

PRENTICE. [*After a moment's reflection.*] If you take that view of it, if you know the facts and are prepared to take the consequences, I have no more to say. Perhaps you're right. I admire your courage. I should like to think that I should have enough to follow your example.

MRS ARDSLEY. There is one thing I'm going to ask you to do for me.

PRENTICE. My dear, anything in the world.

MRS ARDSLEY. I don't want to suffer more than I need. We've always had a great deal of affection for one another, Charlie.

PRENTICE. I suppose we have.

MRS ARDSLEY. You doctors are a brutal lot and there's no end to the amount of pain you can bear in other people.

PRENTICE. I will do everything medical practice permits me to save you from suffering.

MRS ARDSLEY. But I'm going to ask you to do something more.  
[*A long, intent look passes between them.*]

PRENTICE. I'll do even that.

MRS ARDSLEY. [*With a change of manner, cheerfully.*] Then that's all right. And now let's forget that I have anything the matter with me.



[*Sydney gets up, and, coming over to his mother, bends down and kisses her on the forehead.*]

MRS ARDSLEY. As you 're up you might ring the bell, Sydney. I 'm simply dying for a cup of tea.

[*As he rings Ethel comes in.*]

ETHEL. I didn't know you were back, mother.

MRS ARDSLEY. Yes, I got in a few minutes ago. [*Ethel kisses her.*] I was going up to see Evie, but Uncle Charlie thought I 'd better wait.

ETHEL. She 's quite comfortable.

MRS ARDSLEY. Asleep?

ETHEL. No, but resting.

MRS ARDSLEY. Where 's Lois?

ETHEL. She's in her room. She 's just coming.

[*The maid comes in with a tray, which she puts on a little table.*]

MRS ARDSLEY. [*To her.*] Oh, Gertrude, if any one calls I 'm not at home.

GERTRUDE. Very good, ma'am.

MRS ARDSLEY. I don't feel inclined to cope with visitors this afternoon.

PRENTICE. I 'll take myself off.

MRS ARDSLEY. Don't be so stupid. You 're going to stay and have a cup of tea.

PRENTICE. I have other patients, you know.

MRS ARDSLEY. They can wait.

*Lois comes in.*

MRS ARDSLEY. You ought to be starting soon, Lois, oughtn't you?

LOIS. I 've got time yet. It won't take me five minutes to get to the station.

ETHEL. You won't forget the partridges?

LOIS. No.

MRS ARDSLEY. Give Aunt Emily my love.

PRENTICE. You might remember me to her, Lois.

LOIS. I will.

MRS ARDSLEY. Her chrysanthemums ought to be coming on just now.

[*Gertrude has gone out of the room after bringing in the tray, and now comes back.*]

GERTRUDE. Mrs Cedar has called, ma'am.

MRS ARDSLEY. I told you to say I wasn't at home.

GERTRUDE. I said you wasn't, ma'am, but she says it 's very important.

MRS ARDSLEY. Tiresome woman. Tell her I've just come back from Stanbury and I'm very tired. Say, will she forgive me, but I don't feel up to seeing anybody to-day.

GERTRUDE. Very good, ma'am.

*[She is about to go, when the door burst open and Gwen comes in. She is wrought up.]*

GWEN. I'm sorry to force myself on you. It's a matter of life and death. I must see you.

MRS ARDSLEY. I'm not very well, Gwen. Don't you think you can wait till to-morrow?

GWEN. No, no, no, to-morrow it'll be too late. Oh, God, what shall I do?

MRS ARDSLEY. Well, since you're here, perhaps the best thing would be to sit down and have a cup of tea.

GWEN. *[In a strangled voice.]* Lois and Wilfred are going to elope.

MRS ARDSLEY. Oh, my dear, don't be so silly. You're making a perfect nuisance of yourself.

GWEN. It's true, I tell you, it's true.

MRS ARDSLEY. Lois is going to spend a fortnight with my sister-in-law. I didn't think there was anything in what you said to me, but I didn't want any unpleasantness, so I arranged that she should be away till after you'd gone.

GWEN. She's not going to your sister-in-law's. Wilfred's meeting her at Stanbury. They're going to London.

LOIS. What are you talking about, Gwen?

GWEN. I heard every word you said on the 'phone.

LOIS. *[Trying to hide that she is startled.]* When?

GWEN. Just now. Ten minutes ago. You didn't know I'd had an extension put up into my room. I'm not such a perfect fool as you thought me. Can you deny that you spoke to Wilfred?

LOIS. No.

GWEN. You said, Wilfred, it's a go. And he said, what d'you mean? And you said, I'm trusting myself to your tender mercies. You're for it, my boy. I'm going to elope with you.

ETHEL. She was joking with him.

GWEN. A funny joke. He said, my God, you don't mean it. And she said, I'll get out of the train at Stanbury. Meet me in the car and we'll talk it over on the way to London.

MRS ARDSLEY. Is it true, Lois?

LOIS. Yes.

SYDNEY. You damned fool, Lois.

GWEN. Oh, Lois, I've never done you any harm. I've been a good friend to you—you can't take my husband from me.

LOIS. I'm not taking him from you. You lost him years ago.

GWEN. You're young, you'll have plenty of chances before you're through. I'm old and he's all I've got. If he leaves me I swear to you that I'll kill myself.

MRS ARDSLEY. But why have you come here? Why didn't you go to your husband?

GWEN. He won't listen to me. Oh, what a fool I've been. I ought to have known when I saw the pearls.

MRS ARDSLEY. What pearls?

GWEN. She's wearing them now. She pretends they're false, but they're real, and he gave them to her.

MRS ARDSLEY. Take them off, Lois, and give them to Gwen.

*[Without a word Lois undoes the clasp and throws the string on the table.]*

GWEN. Do you think I'd touch them? He hates me. Oh, it's so awful to love someone with all your heart and to know that the very sight of you maddens him beyond endurance. I went down on my knees to him. I begged him not to leave me. He said he was sick to death of me. He pushed me over. I heard the door slam. He's gone. He's gone to join her.

*[She falls to her knees and bursts into a passion of tears.]*

MRS ARDSLEY. Gwen, Gwen, don't give way like that.

*[Gwen, still on her knees, drags herself up to Mrs Ardsley.]*

GWEN. Don't let her go to him. You know what it feels like to be old. You know how defenceless one is. She'll regret it. You don't know what he's like. He'll throw her aside when he's tired of her as he's thrown all the others aside. He's hard and cruel and selfish. He's made me so miserable.

MRS ARDSLEY. If that's true, if he's all you say I should have thought you were well rid of him.

GWEN. I'm too old to start fresh. I'm too old to be left alone. *[She struggles up to her feet.]* He's mine. I went through the divorce court to get him. I won't let him go. *[Turning on Lois.]* I swear to you before God that you shall never marry him. He forced his first wife to divorce him because she hadn't money, but I've got money of my own. I'll never divorce him.

LOIS. Nothing would induce me to marry him.

GWEN. Take him if you want to. He'll come back to me. He's old. He tries to keep up. It's all sham. I know the



effort it is. He's tired to death and he won't give in. What good can he be to you? How can you be so stupid? You ought to be ashamed.

MRS ARDSLEY. Gwen. Gwen.

GWEN. Money. Oh, curse the money. He's a rich man and you haven't got a bob between you. You're all in it. All of you. You all want to get something out of it. You brutes. You beasts. *[Dr Prentice gets up and takes her by the arm.]*

PRENTICE. Come, Mrs Cedar, we've had enough of this. You go too far. You must get out of this.

GWEN. I won't go.

PRENTICE. If you don't, I shall put you out.

*[He urges her towards the door.]*

GWEN. I'll make such a scandal that you'll never be able to hold up your heads again.

PRENTICE. That's enough now. Get out.

GWEN. Leave me alone, damn you.

PRENTICE. I'm going to take you home. Come on.

*[They both go out. There is a moment's awkward silence when the door is closed on them.]*

LOIS. I'm sorry to have exposed you to this disgusting scene, mother.

SYDNEY. You may well be.

ETHEL. You're not really going off with that man, Lois?

LOIS. I am.

ETHEL. You can't be in love with him.

LOIS. Of course not. If I were, d' you think I'd be such a fool as to go?

ETHEL. *[Aghast.]* Lois.

LOIS. If I loved him I'd be afraid.

ETHEL. You don't know what you're doing. It would be awful and unnatural if you loved him, but there would be an excuse for you.

LOIS. Has love done very much for you, Ethel?

ETHEL. Me? I don't know what you mean. I married Howard. I took him for better, for worse.

LOIS. You've been a good wife and a good mother. A virtuous woman. And a lot of good it's done you. I've seen you grow old and tired and hopeless. I'm frightened, Ethel, frightened.

ETHEL. I wasn't obliged to marry. Mother and father were against it.

LOIS. You could have stayed on at home like Evie. So can I.

I'm frightened, Ethel. I'm frightened. I don't want to become like Evie.

ETHEL. Mother, can't you do something? It's so awful. It's such madness.

MRS ARDSLEY. I'm listening to what Lois has to say.

ETHEL. [*With a catch in her breath.*] You're not running away from anybody here?

LOIS. [*Smiling.*] Oh, my dear, that isn't at all in my character.

ETHEL. [*Ashamed and awkward.*] I thought that perhaps someone had been trying to make love to you.

LOIS. Oh, Ethel, don't be so silly. Who is there to make love to me in this God-forsaken place?

ETHEL. I didn't know. Perhaps it was only my fancy. It's just the money?

LOIS. Yes, and what money brings. Freedom and opportunity.

ETHEL. Those are mere words.

LOIS. I'm sick of waiting for something to turn up. Time is flying and soon it'll be too late.

MRS ARDSLEY. When did you decide, Lois?

LOIS. Half an hour ago.

MRS ARDSLEY. Have you considered all the consequences?

LOIS. Oh, mother dear, if I did that I should stay here twiddling my thumbs till my dying day.

MRS ARDSLEY. It's not a very nice thing that you're doing.

LOIS. I know.

MRS ARDSLEY. It's cruel to Gwen.

LOIS. [*With a shrug.*] I or another.

MRS ARDSLEY. It'll be a dreadful blow to your father.

LOIS. I'm sorry.

MRS ARDSLEY. And the scandal won't be very nice for us.

LOIS. I can't help it.

ETHEL. It would be bad enough if you were going to be married. Gwen says she won't divorce.

LOIS. I don't want to marry him.

ETHEL. What's to happen to you if he chucks you?

LOIS. Darling, you're years older than I am and a married woman. How can you be so innocent? Has it never occurred to you what power it gives a woman when a man is madly in love with her and she doesn't care a row of pins for him?

[*Gertrude comes in with the teapot and the hot water on a tray.*]

MRS ARDSLEY. [*To Ethel.*] Go and tell your father tea is ready, Ethel.

[*With a disheartened gesture Ethel goes out.*]

LOIS. I'll go and put on my hat. [*Gertrude goes out.*] I'm sorry to disappoint you, mother. I don't want to cause you pain.

MRS ARDSLEY. Have you quite made up your mind, Lois?

LOIS. Quite.

MRS ARDSLEY. That is what I thought. Then perhaps you *had* better go and put on your hat.

LOIS. What about father? I don't want him to make a scene.

MRS ARDSLEY. I'll tell him after you've gone.

LOIS. Thank you.

[*She goes out. Mrs Ardsley and Sydney are left alone.*]

SYDNEY. Are you going to let her go, mother?

MRS ARDSLEY. How can I stop her?

SYDNEY. You can tell her what the surgeon told you this afternoon.

MRS ARDSLEY. Oh, my dear, with one foot in the grave it's rather late to start blackmail.

SYDNEY. She wouldn't go, you know.

MRS ARDSLEY. I don't think she would. I can't do that, Sydney. I shouldn't like to think of her waiting for my death. I should feel like apologizing for every day I lingered on.

SYDNEY. She might change her mind.

MRS ARDSLEY. She's young, she has her life before her, she must do what she thinks best with it. I don't belong to life any longer. I don't think I have the right to influence her.

SYDNEY. Aren't you afraid she'll come an awful cropper.

MRS ARDSLEY. She's hard and selfish. I don't think she's stupid. She can take care of herself.

SYDNEY. She might be a stranger, to hear you speak.

MRS ARDSLEY. Does it sound unkind? You see, I feel as if nothing mattered very much any more. I've had my day. I've done what I could. Now those who come after me must shift for themselves.

SYDNEY. You're not frightened at all?

MRS ARDSLEY. Not a bit. I'm strangely happy. I'm rather relieved to think it's over. I'm not at home in this world of to-day. I'm pre-war. Everything's so changed now. I don't understand the new ways. To me life is like a party that was very nice to start with, but has become rather rowdy as time went on, and I'm not at all sorry to go home.

[*Ethel comes back.*]

ETHEL. I've told father. He's just coming.

MRS ARDSLEY. I'm afraid we've let the tea stand rather a long time.



SYDNEY. Father likes nothing better than a good strong cup.

[*Lois comes in. She has her hat on.*]

LOIS. [*Startled and anxious.*] Mother, Evie is coming down the stairs.

MRS ARDSLEY. Isn't she asleep?

SYDNEY. Uncle Charlie said he 'd given her something.

[*The door is opened and Eva comes in. Her eyes are bright from the drug the doctor has given her. She has a queer, fixed smile on her face. She has changed into her best frock.*]

MRS ARDSLEY. I thought you were lying down, Evie. They told me you didn't feel quite up to the mark.

EVA. I had to come down to tea. Collie's coming.

LOIS. [*Shocked.*] Collie!

EVA. He 'd have been so disappointed if I hadn't come.

MRS ARDSLEY. You've put on your best dress.

EVA. It is rather an occasion, isn't it? You see, I'm engaged to be married.

ETHEL. Evie, what do you mean?

EVA. I'm telling you beforehand so that you should be prepared. Collie's coming here this afternoon to talk to father about it. Don't say anything about it till he comes.

[*There is a moment's awkward pause. They none of them know what to say or do.*]

MRS ARDSLEY. Let me give you your tea, darling.

EVA. I don't want any tea. I'm too excited. [*She catches sight of the string of pearls that Lois had put on the table.*] What are these pearls doing here?

LOIS. You can have them if you like.

MRS ARDSLEY. Lois.

LOIS. They're mine.

EVA. Can I really? It'll be an engagement present. Oh, Lois, that is sweet of you. [*She goes up to her and kisses her, then, standing in front of the glass puts them on.*] Collie always says I have such a pretty neck.

*Mr Ardsley and Howard come in.*

ARDSLEY. Now what about this cup of tea?

HOWARD. Hulloo, Evie. All right again?

EVA. Oh, yes. There's nothing the matter with me.

ARDSLEY. All ready to start, Lois?

LOIS. Yes.

ARDSLEY. Don't cut it too fine.

HOWARD. I may look you up one of these days, Lois. I've got to go over to Canterbury to see a man on business. I don't suppose I shall be able to get back for the night, Ethel.

ETHEL. No?

HOWARD. I'll come over and fetch you in the car, Lois, and we'll do a picture together.

LOIS. [*Mocking him.*] That would be grand.

ARDSLEY. Well, I must say it's very nice to have a cup of tea by one's own fireside and surrounded by one's family. If you come to think of it we none of us have anything very much to worry about. Of course we none of us have more money than we know what to do with, but we have our health and we have our happiness. I don't think we've got very much to complain of. Things haven't been going too well lately, but I think the world is turning the corner and we can all look forward to better times in future. This old England of ours isn't done yet, and I for one believe in it and all it stands for.

*[Eva begins to sing in a thin cracked voice.]*

EVA.

God save our gracious King!  
Long live our noble King!  
God save our King!

*[The others look at her, petrified, in horror-struck surprise. When she stops Lois gives a little cry and hurries from the room.]*

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